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THE MAN WHO WAS GOOD

A Novel

BY

LEONARD MERRICK

AUTHOR OF 'VIOLET MOSES,' 'MR. BAZALGETTE'S AGENT,' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

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'That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you.'

James Lee's Wife.

THE MAN WHO WAS GOOD

CHAPTER I.

THERE were three women in the dressing-room. Little Miss Macy, who played an ensign, was pulling her uniform off, and the 'Duchess'—divested of velvet—stood brushing the powder out of her hair. The third woman was doing nothing. In a chair by the travelling-basket labelled 'Miss Olive Westland's Tour: "The Foibles of Fashion" Co.,' she sat regarding the others, her gloved hands lying idle in her lap. She was scarcely what is termed 'beautiful,' much less was she what ought to be called 'pretty'; perhaps 'womanly' came nearer to suggesting her than either. Her eyes were not large, but they were so pensive; her mouth was

not small, but it curved so tenderly; the face was not regular, but it looked so deliciously soft. Somebody had once said it always made him feel the utter hopelessness of trying to conceive humanity's features arranged on any other plan than the one God drew for them. And if the same might be said of every face, it was the more natural that it had been said of hers. It seemed, in watching her, such a perfect thing there should be a low white brow, and hair to shade it; it seemed such an excellent and inevitable thing there should be lips just where the Maker put lips, and a chin just where the chin is modelled. Her age might have been twenty-seven, also it might have been thirty. The wise man does not question the nice woman's age, he just thanks Heaven she lives; and she in the chair by the basket was decidedly nice. Other women said so.

'Have you been "in front," Mrs. Carew?' asked the 'Duchess.'

She answered that she had.

'I came round at the end. It was a very good house; the business is improving.'

'I should think,' remarked the ensign, reaching for her skirt, 'you ought to know every line of the piece the times you've seen it! But, of course, you've nothing else to do.'

'No,' Mrs. Carew assented; 'it isn't lively sitting alone all the evening in lodgings. And it's more comfortable in the circle than "behind." How you people manage to get dressed in some of the theatres puzzles me; I look at you from the front, remembering where your things were put on, and marvel. If I were in the profession, my salary wouldn't keep me in the frocks I ruined.'

'I wonder Carew hasn't ever wanted you to enter it.'

The nice woman laughed.

'Enter the profession!' she exclaimed—'I? Good gracious! what an idea! No; Tony has a very flattering opinion of his wife's abilities, but I don't think even he goes the length of fancying I could act.'

'You'd be as good as a certain leading lady we know of, at any rate. Nobody could be much worse than our respected manageress, I'll take my oath!'

'Jeannie,' said the 'Duchess' sharply, 'don't quarrel with your bread-and-butter!'

'I'm not,' retorted the girl; 'I'm criticising it—a very different matter, my dear. I hate these amateurs with money, even if they do take out companies and give "shops" to us "pros." She "queers" the best line I've got in the piece every night because she won't speak up, and nobody knows what on earth I'm supposed to be answering. The real type of the "confidential actress" is Miss Westland; no danger of *her* allowing anyone in the audience to overhear what she says.'

'Tony believes she'll get on all right,' observed Mrs. Carew, 'when she has had more experience. You do, too, don't you, Mrs. Bowman?'

The 'Duchess' replied vaguely that experience did a great deal. She had profited by her own, and at the 'aristocratic mother' period of her career no longer canvassed in dressing-rooms the capabilities of the powers that paid the treasury.

'Get on!' echoed Jeannie Macy, struggling into her jacket, 'of course she'll get on; she has means. She'll do the watering-places in the autumn, and,

if it's very much she's got, you'll see her by-and-by with a theatre of her own in town. Money, influence, or talent, you must have one of the three in the profession, and for a short-cut give me either of the first two. Sweet dreams, both of you; I've got a hot supper waiting for me, and I can smell it spoiling from here!' The door banged behind her, and Mrs. Carew turned to the 'Duchess' with a smile.

'You are coming round to us afterwards, aren't you?' she said.

'Yes, Carew asked the husband in the morning: I hope he's got some coppers. I reminded him. It's such a bother having to keep an account of how we stand after every deal. We'll be round about half-past twelve. Are you going?'

'Tony ought to be ready by now, I should say; I'm going to knock and hurry him up, anyhow. You remember our number?'

'Nine?'

'Nine; opposite the baker's.'

Mrs. Carew hummed a little tune, and made her way down the stairs. The stage, of which she had

a passing view, was dark, for the footlights were out, and in the T-piece only one gas-jet flared bluely between the bare expanse of boards and the blackness of the empty auditorium. In the passage, a man, hastening from the star-room, almost ran against her, and she saw it was the one she sought. Mr. Seaton Carew still wore the clothes in which he finished the play, and the make-up had not been removed from his face.

'What!' she cried, 'not "changed"? How's that? what have you been doing?'

'I've been talking to Miss Westland,' he explained hurriedly. 'There was something she wanted to see me about. Don't wait any longer, Mary; I've got to go up to her lodgings with her.'

She hesitated a moment, surprised.

'Is it so important?' she asked.

'Yes,' he said; 'I'll tell you about it later. I want to have a talk with you afterwards: I shan't be long.'

Whenever she came to the theatre, which was four or five times a week, they always returned together, and the exception was not pleasant to her.

She enjoyed the stroll in the fresh air 'after the show' with Tony. Three years' familiarity with the custom had not destroyed its early charm to her, and to-night she went out into the Leicester streets a shade disconsolately. The gas was already lighted when she reached the house, and a fire—for the month was March—burnt clearly in the grate. The accommodation was not extensive: a small ground-floor parlour, and a bedroom at the back. On the sitting-room mantelpiece some faded photographs of people who had stayed there—Mr. Delancey as 'The Silver King'; Miss Ida Ryan, smoking a cigarette, as 'Sam Willoughby'—contributed toward a certain professional air which makes all the apartments supported by the actor on tour so curiously alike. She took off her cloak, and, turning her back on the supper-table, wondered what the conference with Miss Westland was about. A woman is never alone where there is a fire, and she got through half an hour passably well; but after that the tedium of the delay began to tell upon her. The landlady had brought in her book of references during the afternoon, with the request

that Mr. and Mrs. Carew would accord her theirs; and fetching it from where it lay, she began to turn the leaves, listlessly reading the scribbled testimonials. These inevitable reference-books were Tony's special aversion, for he vowed he never knew what to write, and, perusing the comments contained in this one, she mentally agreed with him that it was not easy to find a medium between curtness and exaggeration. Some she recognised, knowing what signatures were appended before she looked. The 'Stay but a little, I will come again' quotation she had encountered above the same name in a score of lodgings, and two or three 'impromptus' in rhyme she likewise remembered to have met before.

She had been very happy this time in Leicester. They had arrived on the anniversary of her and Tony's first meeting, and she had felt additionally tender towards him all the week. Mrs. Liddy, who let the rooms, had not effected the happiness certainly, but her lodger was quite willing to give her some of the benefit of it, womanlike. She dipped the pen in the ink, and wrote in a bold, upright

hand, 'The week spent in Mrs. Liddy's apartments will always be a pleasant recollection to Mr. and Mrs. Seaton Carew.' Then she put the date underneath.

She had just finished when Mrs. Liddy entered with the beer. The Irishwoman said she was going to bed, but Mrs. Carew would find more glasses in the cupboard when her friends came, and she supposed that was all. Gas and coals are rarely matters of dispute in theatrical lodgings, and Mrs. Liddy retired to rest with her heart unharassed, though they might burn till sunrise.

It was now twelve o'clock, and Mrs. Carew, with an occasional glance at the cold beef and corner of rice pudding, began to walk about the room. Presently she stopped in her perambulations among the shiny furniture, and listened. A whistle had reached her from the outside, the *dee di-dum di-da di-didy*, which is the call of the English-speaking Thespian all over the world. She knew who that must be — young Dolliver, the third of their expected guests, who had forgotten their number, as he invariably did in every city they visited. She

drew aside the blind, and allowed the light to shine out through the glass. Young Dolliver it was.

'I've been whistling all up and down the road,' he said, in an aggrieved manner when she had let him in; 'what were you doing?'

'Well, that isn't bad,' she laughed. 'Why don't you remember addresses like anybody else?'

'Can't,' he declared; 'never could. Never know where I'm staying myself if I don't make a note of it as soon as I engage the place. In Jarrow, one Monday, I had to wander all over the town for three mortal hours in the pouring rain, looking for someone belonging to the company to tell me where I lived. Hallo! where's Carew?'

'He'll be in directly,' she said; 'sit down.'

'Oh! I'm awfully sorry to have come so early,' he exclaimed; 'you haven't "fed," or anything.'

He was a bright-faced boy, with a cheery flow of chatter that made dulness impossible, and she was glad he had appeared.

'I expect the Bowmans any minute,' she assured him; 'you aren't early. Do sit down, there's a

good child, and don't stand fiddling your hat about; there, put it on the piano. Have you banqueted yourself?'

'To repletion. What did you think of Carew's notice in the Great Sixpennyworth on Saturday? Wasn't it swagger? "The *rôle* finds an ideal exponent in Mr. Seaton Carew, an actor who is rapidly making his way into the foremost ranks of his profession!"'

'A line and a half,' she said, 'by a provincial correspondent! I shan't be satisfied till——well!'

'I know—till you see him with sixteen lines all to himself in the *Telegraph*. No more will he, I fancy. He's red-hot on success, is Carew—do anything for it. So'm I; I should like to play Claude.'

'Claude!' she echoed. 'Why, you're funny!'

'Not by disposition,' he averred. 'Miss Westland is responsible for my being funny. When they said "a small comedy-part is still vacant," I said small comedy-parts are my forte of fortes! Had it been an "old man" that was wanted, I should have professed myself born to dodder. But

if it comes to choice—to the secret tendency of the sacred fire—I am "lead," I am romantic, I have centre-entrances in the limelight! Look here: "A deep vale, shut out by Alpine——" No, wait a minute; you do the Langtry-business, and let the flowers fall, while I "paint the home." Do you know, my private opinion is that Claude only took those lessons to save the widow any outlay for doing up the home! Haven't got any flowers? Anything else then—where are the cards?'

He found the pack on the sideboard, and pushed a few into her hand.

'These'll do for the flowers,' he said; 'finger 'em lovingly; think you're holding a good nap.'

'Don't be so ridiculous!' she exclaimed.

'I'm not,' responded Dolliver, with dignity; 'I really want to hear your views on my reading. Where was I—er—er——

> '"Near a clear lake margin'd by fruits of gold
> And whispering myrtles; glassing softest skies
> As cloudless, save with rare and roseate shadows . . .
> As I would have thy fate."

You see I make a pause after "shadows," seeking

a simile. I gaze in momentary hesitation at the floats, and the borders, and a kid in the pit. Then I encounter the eyes of the fair Pauline, and conclude with "As I would have thy fate," smiling dreamily at the excellence of my own conceit. That's a new point, I take it ?'

He was quite enamoured of his 'new point,' and was still expatiating on its beauty, when they heard Carew unlocking the street-door.

It was a man much of the woman's own age who came in. His face was clean-shaven, and his hair worn a trifle longer than the autocrat of the barber-shop permits it to remain on the heads of the young gentlemen who defer to his taste. Now that he was seen in a good light, it was plain he was disturbed; but he shook Dolliver by the hand as if he were relieved to find him there.

'What, not had supper? You must be starving, Mary !'

'I am pretty hungry,' she admitted; 'aren't you ?'

'Well, I've had something—still, I'll come to the table.' She had looked disappointed, and he drew his chair up. 'Dolliver ?'

'Nothing for me, thanks. Oh! a glass of beer —I don't object to that.'

Mary, despite her assertion that she was hungry, made no great progress with her supper, and Seaton's evident disquietude even damped the garrulity of the boy. It was not until the Bowmans arrived, and a game of napoleon had been commenced, that the faint restraint caused by his manner wore away.

Mr. Bowman, mindful of his wife's injunction, had obtained several shillings' worth of coppers, and, profiting by his forethought, each of the party began with a rouleau of pence. These occasional reunions in somebody or another's lodgings after the performance had become quite an institution in 'The Foibles of Fashion' Company, and it was seldom that anyone found them expensive. Mary's entire capital, coppers included, was half a sovereign, and to have won or lost such a sum as that at a sitting would have been the subject of allusion for a month. To-night, however, the luck was curiously unequal, and, to the surprise of all, Dolliver found himself losing seven shillings before

they had been playing half an hour. Much sympathy was expressed for Dolliver.

'Never mind, dear boy; it's always a mistake to win at the start,' observed Carew. 'There's plenty of time. I pass!'

'Pass,' said the 'Duchess.'

Mary called three, and made them.

'How do you stand, Mrs. Carew?' asked Bowman.

'I'm just about the same as when we began,' said she.—'Tony, Mr. Bowman has nothing to drink.—Oh, what a shame, Dolliver!—thanks! Fill up your own, won't you?—He's a perfect martyr, this boy,' she added; 'he cleared the table before you two people came in — didn't you?'

'Four!' cried Dolliver. 'Yes; I cleared it beautifully; "utility" is my line of business.'

'Since when? I thought just now——'

'Oh, confidences, Mrs. Carew!' He turned scarlet. 'Don't give me away! . . . Now, Mrs. Bowman, which is it to be?'

She played trumps, and led with a king.

A breathless moment, crowned by an unsuspected 'little one' from Dolliver. His 'four' were safe, and he leant back radiant.

The 'Duchess' prepared to deal.

'Who's got an address for the next town?' she inquired.

'Haven't you written yet?'

'No, we haven't got a place to write to; hateful, isn't it? If there's a thing I abominate, it's having to roam about looking for rooms after one gets in. We've—pass—always stayed in the same house, and—everybody to put in the kitty again—and now the woman's left, or something. My! isn't the kitty getting big! Look at all those sixpences underneath; somebody count it.'

'Now then, Carew, don't go to sleep!'

Carew, thus adjured, gathered up the cards. He was fitfully almost himself again, and only Mary was really sure that anything was amiss.

'There's a little hotel I've stopped at there,' he said. 'Not at all bad—they find you everything for twenty-five bob the week; for two people there'd be a reduction, too. Remind me, and I'll

give you the name of it; I have it in my book. —Bowman, you to call!'

Bowman called nothing; everybody passed again, and the kitty was further augmented.

'What time do we travel Sunday — anybody know?'

'You can be precious sure,' said Bowman, 'that it will be at some unearthly hour. I've had a good many years' experience in the profession, but I never in my life was in a company where they did so many night journeys as they do in this. I believe that little outsider arranges it on purpose!'

'A "daisy" of an acting-manager, isn't he? I once knew another fellow much the—two, I call two—and then, at the end of the tour, hanged if they didn't rush us for a presentation to him!'

'So they will for this chap. Presentations in the profession, upon my soul, are the——'

'Three!' said the 'Duchess.'

'And, when the time comes, not a member of the crowd will have the pluck to refuse his half-crown, you see!'

'Did you ever know an actor who had, when he was asked for one?'

Dolliver flushed excitedly.

'Nap!' he exclaimed.

'Oh, oh, oh! Dolliver goes nap!'

'No; d'ye mean it? Very well, fire ahead, then; play up!'

There was two minutes' silence, and the youngster smacked down his last card, preparing a smile for defeat.

'He's made it! Mrs. Bowman, you threw it away; if you'd played hearts, instead——'

'No, no, she couldn't help it. She had to follow suit.'

'Of course!'—the 'Duchess' caught feebly at the explanation—'I had to follow suit. What a haul! good gracious!'

'That puts you right again, eh, dear boy?'

'"I am once more the great house of Lyons!"' remarked Dolliver, piling up the pennies. 'Six, seven, eight! Look at the silver, great Scot! Mrs. Carew, there's the ninepence I owe you.'

'"I have paid this woman, and I owe her

nothing,"' quoted Seaton. 'Dolliver, you've ruined me, you beggar! Where's the 'bacca?'

At something to three there was a murmur about it being late, but the loser now was Mrs. Bowman, and, her shillings having drifted into the possession of Mary, the hostess said it really was not late at all. This disposed of the breaking-up question for half an hour. Then Bowman began to talk of concluding the game after a couple of rounds. No game ever yet was concluded after the number of rounds originally decided on, and when two of these arrangements had been set at nought, the 'Duchess' proposed that they should finish at the next 'nap.' To 'finish at the next nap' is a euphemism for continuing a good long while, and the resolution was carried unanimously.

The clock had struck four when the nap was made, and the winner was Mary. She had won upwards of six shillings, and the 'Duchess,' who was the poorer by it, smiled with sleepy resignation.

'You had the luck, after all, Mrs. Carew,' laughed Dolliver. 'Good-night.'

'Yes,' she said carelessly; 'I've made something

between me and the workhouse, anyhow. Good-night.'

She loitered about the room, putting little aimless touches to things about, while Carew saw the trio to the door. She heard him shut it behind them, and heard their steps growing fainter on the pavement. He was slow returning, queerly slow. Dolliver's voice reached her, separating from the Bowmans at the corner, and still he had not come in.

'Tony!' she called.

He rejoined her almost as she spoke.

'Don't go to bed, Mary,' he said huskily; 'I've something to say to you.'

'What is it?' she asked.

He hesitated an instant, seeking an introductory phrase. The agitation he had been fighting all the night had conquered him.

'My release has come at last,' he answered. 'My wife is dead.'

'Dead!'

She stood gazing at him with dilated eyes, the colour ebbing from her cheeks.

'She was ill some time; drink it was, I hear—I dare say. Anyhow, she's gone; the mistake is finished. I've paid for it dearly enough, Lord knows!'

He had paused midway between her and the hearth, and he moved to the hearth. She was sensible of a vague pang as he did so. A tense silence followed his words. In thoughts she had been unable to escape; the woman who had paid for his mistake more dearly still had sometimes imagined such a moment as this—had sometimes foreseen him crying to her that he was free. Perhaps, now that the moment was here, it was a little wanting—a little barer than the declaration of freedom she had pictured.

'One cannot but feel it a great shock,' she said at length, half inaudibly. 'It is always a shock, the news of death.' But she felt the burden of speech should be assumed by him. 'Were you—used you to be very fond of her? Does it come back?'

'I was twenty. "Fond"? I don't know. I wasn't with her three months, when—— She had

walked Liverpool. I never saw her from the day I found it out. She didn't want me; the money was enough for her—to be sure of it every week.'

His attitude remained unchanged, his hands thrust deep into his trouser-pockets. Opposite each other they both reviewed the past. She waited for him to come to her—to touch her. Yes, the reality was barer than the picture she had seen.

'When was it?' she murmured.

'It was some weeks ago.'

'So long!'

He left the hearth moodily, and commenced to pace the room from end to end. The woman did not stir. The memory was with her of the morning he had avowed this marriage—of the agony that had wept to her for pity—of the clasp that would not let her go. She looked abstractedly at the fire his withdrawal had exposed; but in her heart she saw his every step, and counted the turns that kept him from her side.

'It makes a great difference!' he said abruptly.

The consciousness of the difference was flooding

her reason, yet she did not speak. It should not be by herself the sanctification of her sacrifice was broached. The wish, the reminder, the reparation, all should be his. She nodded assent.

'A great difference,' he repeated hoarsely. He smeared the dampness from his mouth and chin. 'If—if my reputation were made now, Mary, I should ask you to be my wife—'

And then she did not speak. There was an instant in which the wall swam before her in a haze, and the floor lurched. In the next, she was still fronting the fireplace; she was staring at it with the old intentness of regard; and his voice was sounding again, though she heard it dully:

'—while a poor one cannot choose. I would—I would ask you to marry me. I know what you've been to me—I don't forget—I know very well. But, as it is, it would be madness—it would be putting a rope round my own neck! I want you to hear how I'm situated. I want you to listen to the circumstances——'

'You will not make amends?'

'I tell you I'm not my own master.'

'You tell me that we have to part! We cannot remain together any longer unless I am your wife.'

'We cannot remain together any longer at all; that is what I'm coming to.' He went back to the mantelpiece, and leant his elbows on it, kicking the half-hot coals. 'I am going to marry Miss Westland!'

He had said it; the echo of the utterance sung in his ears. Behind him her figure was motionless —its stillness frightened him. Intensified by the riotous ticking of the clock, in which his pulses were strained through their throbbing for the relief of a rustle, a breath, the pause grew unendurable.

'For God's sake, why don't you say something!' he exclaimed. He faced her impetuously, and they looked at each other across the table. 'Mary, it is my chance in life! She cares for me, don't you see. You think me a scoundrel—don't you see what a chance it is! What can I come to as I am? With her—she will get on, she has money—I shall rise, I shall be a manager, I shall get to London in time. Mary!'

'You are—going—to marry—Miss Westland?'

'I must,' he said.

For the veriest second it was almost as if she were struggling to understand. Then she threw out her hands dizzily, crying out:

'This is what your love was, then—a lie, a shameful lie!'

'It wasn't; no, Mary, it was real! I cared for you—I did; the thing is forced upon me!'

'Cared, when you use your liberty like this! You "cared"! And I pitied you—you wrung the soul of me with your despair—I forgave you keeping back the tale so long! I came to you to be your wife, and you went down on your knees, and vowed you had not had the courage to tell me before, but your wife was living—some awful woman you couldn't divorce. I gave myself to you, I became the thing you can turn out of doors, all because I loved you, all because I believed in your love for me.' She caught at her throat. 'You deserved it, did you not?—you justify it now so nobly—the faith that has made me a——'

'Mary!'

'Oh, I can say it,' she burst forth hysterically. 'I *am*, you know; you have made me one—you and your "love"! Why shouldn't I say it?'

'I told you the truth; if I had been free at that time——'

'When did you hear the news of the death? Answer me—it wasn't to-night!'

'What is the difference,' he muttered, 'when I heard?'

'Oh!' she moaned, 'go away from me, don't come near me! You coward!'

She sank on to the edge of the sofa, rocking herself to and fro. The man roamed aimlessly around. Once or twice he glanced across at her, but she paid no heed. His pipe was on the sideboard; he filled it clumsily, and drew at it in nervous pulls.

He was the first to speak again.

'I know I seem a hound, I know it all looks very bad; but I don't suppose there's a man in five hundred who would refuse such an opportunity, for all that. No, nor one in five thousand, either. You won't see it in an unprejudiced light,

of course; but it seems to me—yes, it does, and I can't help saying so—that if you were really as fond of me as you think, if my interests were really dear to you, you would yourself counsel me to leap at the chance, and, what's more, feel honestly glad that a prospect of success had come in my way. You know what it means to me,' he went on querulously; 'you have been in the profession—at least, as good as in the profession—three years; you know that in the ordinary course of events I should never get any higher than I am, never play in London in my life. You know I've gone as far as I can ever expect to go without influence to back me, that in ten years' time I should be exactly what I am now, a leading-man for second-rate tours; and that ten years later I should be playing "heavy fathers," or Lord knows what, still "on the road," and done for—the fire all spent, wasted and worn out in the provinces. That's what it would be; you've heard me say it again and again; and I should go on seeing Miss Somebody's son, and Mr. Somebody-else's daughter, with their parents' names to get them the engagements, playing pro-

minent business in London theatres before they've learnt how to walk across a stage. Miss Westland's a fine-looking girl, and she knows a lot of society people in town; and she has money enough to take some house there when she's lost her amateurishness a bit. Right off I shall be somebody, too; I shall manage the business arrangements. I'll have a column "ad." in the *Era* every week: "For vacant dates apply to Mr. Seaton Carew!" Oh, Mary, it's such a chance, such a lift! I am fond of you, you know I am; I care more for your little finger than for that woman's body and soul. Don't think me callous; it's damnable I've got to behave so—it takes all the light, all the luck, out of the thing that the way to it is so hard. I wish you could know what I'm feeling.'

'I think I do know,' she said bitterly—'better than you, perhaps. You are remembering how easily you could have taken the luck if your prayers to me had failed. And you are angered at me in your heart because the shame you feel spoils so much of the pleasure now.'

He was humiliated to perceive this was true.

Her words described a mean nature, and his resentment deepened.

'When did you tell Miss Westland?' she faltered.

'Tell her?'

'What I am—that I am not—— When was it?'

'This evening. It won't make any awkwardness for you; I mean, she won't speak of it to any of the others. Nobody will know for——'

'The whole company may know to-morrow!' she answered, drying her eyes. 'Seeing that I shall be gone, they may know to-morrow as well as later. Oh, how they will talk, all of them, how they will talk about me—the Bowmans, and that boy, too!'

'You will be gone to-morrow! What do you say?'

'Do you suppose——'

'Mary, there are—I must make some—good heavens! how will you go?—where? Mary, listen: by-and-by, when something is settled, in—in a month or more—I want to arrange to send—I couldn't let you want for money, don't you see!'

'I would not take one penny from you,' she said, 'not the value of one penny, if I were dying! I would not, as Christ hears me! Our life together is over—I am going away!'

He looked at her aghast.

'Now,' he ejaculated, 'at once? In the middle of the night?'

'Now at once—in the middle of the night!'

'Be reasonable'—he caught her fingers, and held them in miserable expostulation—'wait till day, at any rate. You are beside yourself; there is nothing to be gained by it. In the morning, if you must——'

'Oh!' she choked, 'do you think I would stop here an hour after this? Did you—did you think so? You man! Yes, I should be no worse to *you!* but to *me*, the lowness of it! All in a moment the lowness of it! I have tried to feel that we were married; I always believed it was your trouble that I had to be what I was. If you had ever heard—as soon as it was possible, I thought every minute would have been a burden to you until you had made it all real and right. To

stop with you now, the thing I am—despised—on sufferance——'

She dragged her hand away from him and stumbled into the bedroom. There it was quite dark, and, shaking, she groped about for matches and the candle. A small gladstone, painted with the initials of Mary Brettan, her own name, was under the toilet-table. She pulled it out, and, dropping on her knees before the trunk that held her wardrobe, hastily pushed in a little of the top-most linen. As she did so, her eyes fell on the wedding-ring she wore; painful at all times, the sight of it now was horrible. She strangled a sob, and, lifting the candlestick, peered stupidly around; by the parlour grate she could hear Tony knocking his pipe out on the bars. Above the washstand a holland 'tidy' contained her brushes; she rolled it up and crammed the irregularly-shaped bundle among the linen. In fastening the bag she hesitated, and looked irresolutely at the trunk. Going over to it, she paused again—left it; returned to it. She plunged her arm suddenly into its depths, and thrust the debated thing into her bag

as if it burnt her. Across the photographer's address was written, 'Yours ever, Tony.' Her preparations for leaving him had not occupied ten minutes. Then she went back.

Her cloak and hat lay by the piano where she had cast them on her arrival from the theatre, and, fascinated, the man watched her proceed to put them on.

'There is your ring,' she said.

The tears were running down her cheeks; she dabbed at them with a handkerchief as she spoke. The baseness of it all was eating into him. Though the ardour of his earlier passion was gone, and his protestations of affection had been insults, her loss and her aversion served to display the growth of a certain attachment to her of which her possession and her constancy had left him unaware. Twice a plea to her to remain rose to his lips, and twice his tongue was heavy from self-interest and from shame. He followed her instinctively into the passage; his limbs quaked, and his soul was cowed. She had already opened the door and set her foot upon the step.

'Mary!' he gasped.

It was almost beginning to get light. Under the faint paling of the sky the pavements gleamed cold and gray, forlornly visible in the darkness.

'Mary, don't go!'

A rush of chill air swept out of the silence, raising the hair from her brow. The cloak fell about her loosely in thick folds. He put out nervous hands to touch her, and nothing but these folds seemed assailable; they enveloped her, and denied her to him.

'Don't go,' he stammered; 'stay—forget what I have done!'

She saw the impulse at its worth, but she was grateful for its happening. She knew he would regret it if she listened, knew he knew he would regret it. And yet, knowing it and disdaining it as she did, the gladfulness and thankfulness were there that he had spoken.

'I could not,' she answered—her voice was gentler; 'there can never be anything between you and me any more! Good-bye.'

She walked from him steadily into the night. The receding figure was erect—uncertain—merged in gloom. He stood gazing after it till it was gone——

CHAPTER II.

The town lay around her desolate. Her footsteps smote the wretchedly-laid street, and echoed on the loneliness. A cold wind blew in fitful gusts, nipping her cheeks and hands. On the vagueness of the market-place the gilded statue, with its sheen obscured, loomed shapeless as she passed. She heard the lumber and creak of a waggon straining out of sight; the quaver of a cock-crow, then one shriller and more prolonged; two or three thin screams in quick succession from a distant train. She knew, rather than decided, that she would go to London, though there would not be a familiar face to greet her in all its miles of houses, not a door among its hundreds of thousands of doors behind which anybody dwelt who was not strange. She would go there because when a

human being is adrift in England, and England means a blur of names equally unpitying, London, somehow, seems the natural place to book to. Few people's ruin leaves them alone at once; the crash, when it comes, generally sees certain friends about who prove loyal beneath the shock of the catastrophe, and only drop away afterwards under the wearisomeness of the worries. It is the situation of few to emerge from the wreck of a home without any personality dominating their consciousness as the counsellor to whom they must fly for aid. But it was the situation of Mary Brettan to be without a soul to turn to in the world, and briefly it had happened thus: Her father had been a country doctor with a large practice among patients who could not afford to pay. From the standpoint of humanity his conduct was admirable; regarded from the domestic hearthstone perhaps it was a little less. The practitioner who neglected the wife of the mayor in order to attend a villager, because the villager's condition was more critical, offered small promise of leaving his child provided for, and before Mary was sixteen the problems of

the rent and butcher's book were as familiar to her as the surgery itself. The exemplary doctor and unpractical parent struggled along more or less placidly by means of the girl's surveillance. Had he survived her, it is difficult to determine what would have become of him, but, dying first, he had her protection to the end. She found herself after the funeral with a crop of bills, some shabby furniture, and the necessity for earning a living. The furniture and the bills were easy to dispose of; they represented a sum in division with nothing over. The important consideration was what she was fitted to do. She knew none of those things which used to be called 'accomplishments,' and are to-day the elements of education. Her French was the French of 'Le Petit Précepteur'; in German she was still bewildered by the article. And, a graver drawback—since the selling-price of education is an outrage on its cost—she had not been brought up to any trade. She belonged, in fact, and circumstances had caused her to discover it, to the ranks of refined incompetence: the incompetence that will not live by menial labour

because it is refined; the refinement that cannot support itself by any brain work because it is incompetent. It was suggested that she might possibly enter the hospital of a neighbouring town and try to qualify for a sick-nurse. She said, 'Very well.' By-and-by she was told she could be admitted to the hospital, and, if she proved herself capable, that would be the end of her troubles. She said 'Very well' again, and this time 'thank you.'

She had a good constitution, and she saw that if she failed here she might starve at her leisure before any further efforts were put forth on her behalf; so she gave satisfaction in her probation, and became at length a nurse like the others, composed and reliable. When that stage arrived, she owned to having fainted, and suppressed the fact, after an early experience of the operating-room; her reputation was established, and it did not matter now. The surgeon smiled.

Miss Brettan had been Nurse Brettan several years, when an actor who had met with an accident was placed as inmate of one of the beds allotted to

her charge. The mishap had cost him his engagement, and he bewailed his fate to everyone who would listen. The person who heard most was naturally his nurse, and she began by feeling sorry for him. He was a paying patient, or they would have turned him out with a pair of clumsy white crutches much sooner; as it was, it was many weeks before he was pronounced well enough to leave, and during those weeks she remembered what in the years' routine she had forgotten—that she was a woman, capable of love.

One evening she learnt that the man who had taught her this also cared for her; and he asked her to marry him. She stooped as he drew her down, and across the tea-tray they kissed silently, so that the patients on either side might not hear. Then she went upstairs, and cried—with joy.

He talked to her about himself more than ever after that, suppressing only the one all-important fact he lacked the courage to avow; and when at last he went away their betrothal was made public, and it was settled she should join him in London as soon as he was able to write for her to come.

There were many expressions of goodwill heaped upon Nurse Brettan on the summer morning that she bade the Yaughton Hospital farewell; a joint wedding-gift from the other nurses was presented, and everybody shook her hand, and wished her a life of happiness, for she was popular. Carew met her at Euston; he had written he had obtained another engagement, and that they would shortly be starting together on the tour, but in the meanwhile were to be married in town. It was the first time she had been to the Metropolis. He took her to lodgings in Guilford Street, and there occurred their great scene.

When a boy, he confessed, he had made a desperate marriage; he had not set eyes on the woman since he discovered her past, but he could not dissolve the union, because the law did not permit it. He was bound to a wanton, and he loved Mary. Would she forgive his deception, and be his wife in everything except the ceremony that could not be performed?

It was a very terrible scene indeed; he thought for a minute he had killed her. For so many

minutes that he believed her lost to him she could only be brought to give ear to his entreaties by force, and he upbraided himself for not having disclosed his position in the first instance. He had excused his cowardice by calling it expedience. But, to do him justice, he did not do justice to himself. The delay was due far less to his sense of its expedience than to the tremors of his cowardice. Now he suffered scarcely less than she.

Had his plea been based on any but the insuperable obstacle it was, it would have failed to a certainty, but his helplessness gave the sophistry of both full play. He harped on the 'grandeur of the sacrifice' she would be making for him, and the phrase pierced her misery. He cried to her it would be a heroism, and she wondered dully if it really would. She queried if there was indeed a higher duty than denial—if her virtue could be merely selfishness in disguise. His insistence on the nobility of consent went very far with her; it did seem a beautiful thing to let sunshine into her lover's life at the cost of her own transgression. And then in the background burnt a hot shame at

the thought of being questioned and commiserated when she returned to the hospital with a petition to be reinstalled. The arguments of both were very stale, and they equally blinked the fact that the practical use of matrimony is to protect woman against the innate fickleness of man. He demanded why, from a logical point of view, the comradeship of two people should be any more sacred because a third person in a surplice said it was; and she, with his arms round her, began to persuade herself he was a martyr, who had broken his leg that she might cross his path and give him consolation. Ultimately he triumphed, and a fortnight later she burst into a tempest of sobs, in suddenly realizing how happy she was.

He introduced her to everybody as his wife, their 'honeymoon' being spent in the, to her, unfamiliar atmosphere of a theatrical tour. One of the first places the company visited was West Hartlepool, and he and she had lodgings outside the town in a little sea-swept village—a stretch of sand, and a lane or two, with a sprinkling of cottages—called Seaton Carew, from which, he

told her, he had borrowed his professional name. She said, 'Dear Seaton Carew!' and felt in a silly minute that she longed to strain the sunny prospect against her heart.

In the rawness of dawn a clock struck five, and she stood forsaken in the streets.

The myriad clocks of Leicester took up the burden, and the air was beaten with their din. The way to the station appeared endless; yards were preternaturally lengthened; and ever pressing on, yet ever with a lonely vista to be distanced, the walk to it began to be charged with the oppression of a nightmare, in which the terrified sleeper pursues some illimitable road seeking a destination that has vanished.

At length the building loomed before her, ponderously still, and she passed in across the cobstones. There were no indications of life about the place; the booking-office was fast shut, and between the dimly-burning lamps the empty track of rails lay blue. For all she knew to the contrary, she would have to wait some hours.

By-and-by, however, a sleepy-eyed porter lounged

into sight, and she learnt there would be a train in a few minutes. Shortly after his advent she was able to procure a ticket, a third-class ticket, which diminished the little sum in her possession by eight shillings and a halfpenny; and returning to the custody of her bag, she waited miserably until the line of carriages thundered into view.

It was a wretched journey—a ghastly horror of a journey—but it did not seem particularly long; with nothing to look forward to, she had no cause to be impatient. Intermittently she dozed, waking with a start as the train jerked to a standstill and the name of the station was bawled out. Only when St. Pancras was reached she felt she had been travelling a long time. Her limbs were cramped as she descended among the groups of dreary-faced passengers rapidly thinning, and the burden on her brain lay like a physical weight. She had not washed since the previous evening, and she made her way to the waiting-room, where the contents of her purse were further decreased by a dejected attendant; after which, having paid twopence to leave the bag behind her while she

traversed the city, she went out to search for a room.

A coffee-bar with a quantity of stale pastry heaped in the window reminded her that she needed breakfast. She entered it, and a man with blue shirt-sleeves rolled over red arms brought her tea and bread-and-butter at a sloppy table. The repast, if not enjoyable, served to refresh her, and was worth the fourpence she could very ill afford. Some of the faintness passed, and when she stood in the fresh air again her head was clearer; the vagueness with which she had thought and spoken was gone.

It was not quite five minutes to eight; she wished she had rested in the waiting-room. To be seeking a lodging at five minutes to eight would look strange. Still, she could not reconcile herself to going back; and she was eager, besides, to find a home as quickly as possible, yearning to be alone with the door shut and a pillow.

She turned down Judd Street, forlornly scanning the intersecting squalor. The tenements around her were not attractive. On the parlour-floor limp

chintz curtains hid the interiors from view, but the steps and the areas, and here and there a frouzy head and arm protruding for a milkcan, were strong in suggestion of slatternly discomfort. In Brunswick Square the aspect was more cheerful, but the rooms here were obviously above her means. She walked along, and came unexpectedly into Guilford Street, almost opposite the house where she had given herself to Tony. The sudden sight of it was not the shock she would have imagined it must prove; indeed, she was sensible of a dull sort of wonder at the absence of sensation. But for the veranda and confirmatory number, the outside would have borne no significance to her; yet it had been in that house—— What a landmark in her life's history was represented by that house! What emotions had flooded her soul behind the stolid frontage she had nearly passed unrecognised! How she had wept and suffered, and prayed and joyed, inside the walls which would have borne no significance to her but for a veranda and the number that proclaimed it was so! The thoughts were deliberate; the past

was not flashed back at her, she retraced it half tenderly in the midst of her trouble. None the less, the idea of taking up her quarters on the spot was eminently repugnant, and she rounded several corners before she permitted herself to ring at a bell.

Her summons was answered by a flurried servant-girl, who, hearing she wanted a lodging, became helplessly incoherent—as is the manner of servant-girls where lodgings are let—and fled to the basement murmuring 'missis.'

Mary contemplated the hat-stand until the 'missis' advanced towards her along the passage. There was a flavour of abandoned breakfast about missis, an air of interruption; and when she perceived the stranger on her threshold was a young woman, and a charming woman, and a woman by herself, the air of interruption which she had been struggling to conceal all the way up the kitchen-stairs began to be coupled with an expression of defensive virtue.

'I am looking for a room,' said Mary.

'Yes,' said the householder, eyeing her askance.

'You have one to let, I think, by the card?'

'Yes, there is a room.'

She made no movement to show it, however; she stood on the mat nursing her elbows.

'Can you let me see it—if it isn't inconvenient so early?'

'Oh, as to that!' said the landlady. She preceded her to the top-floor, but with no marked alacrity. 'This is the room,' she said.

It was a back attic of the regulation pattern: brown drugget, yellow chairs, and a bed of parti-coloured clothing. Nevertheless, it seemed to be clean, and Mary was prepared to take anything.

'What is the rent?' she asked wearily.

'Did you say your husband would be joining you?'

'My husband? No, I am a widow.'

There was a glance shot at her hand. She wore gloves, but saw it would have been wiser to have told the truth, and said 'I am unmarried.'

'As a single room, the rent is seven shillings. You would be able to give me references, of course?'

'I am afraid I could not do that,' she answered, not a little surprised. 'I have only just arrived; my luggage is at the station.'

'Humph, what do you work at?'

'Really,' she exclaimed, 'I am looking for a room! You want references; well, I will pay you in advance.'

'I don't take single ladies,' answered the woman bluntly.

Mary looked at her bewildered; she thought she had not made herself understood.

'I should be quite willing to pay in advance,' she repeated. 'I am a stranger in London, so I cannot refer you to anyone here; but I will pay for the first week now, if you like?'

'I don't take ladies; I must ask you to look somewhere else, if you please.'

They went down in silence. Virtue turned the handle with its backbone stiff, and Mary passed out, giving a quiet 'Good-day.' Her blood was tingling under the inexplicable insolence of the treatment she had received, and she had yet to learn that in the greatest metropolis of the world

an unaccompanied woman may seek a lodging until she falls exhausted on the pavement; the unaccompanied woman being to the London landlady an improper person—inadmissible not because she is improper, but because her impropriety is not monopolized.

During the next hour repulse followed repulse. Sometimes, with the curt assertion that they did not take ladies, the door was shut in her face; frequently she was conducted to a room, only to be cross-examined and refused, as with her first venture, just when she was on the point of engaging it. Sometimes an apartment was displayed indifferently, and there were no questions put at all, but in these instances the terms asked were so exorbitant that she came out marvelling, not comprehending the cause.

It occurred to her to try the places where she would be known—not the Guilford Street house, the associations of that would be quite unendurable, but some of the apartments Carew and she had occupied when they had come to town between the tours. None of these addresses were in the neigh-

bourhood, however, and the notion was too distasteful to be adopted save on impulse.

She set her teeth, and pulled bell after bell. Along Southampton Row, through Cosmo Place into Queen Square, she wandered while the day grew brighter and brighter; down Devonshire Street into Theobald's Road, past the Holborn Town Hall. Amid these reiterated demands of references a sudden terror seized her: she remembered the need of the certificate that she had brought away when she quitted the hospital. She had never thought about it since. It might be lying crushed in a corner of the trunk she had left behind in Leicester; it might long ago have got destroyed, she did not know; it had never occurred to her that the resumption of her former calling would one day present itself as her natural resource. Under ordinary circumstances the loss would have been a trifle, but since to refer directly to the matron was to her an impossibility, inasmuch as it would lead to the exposure of what she would never avow, her true position in the interval, the absence of a certificate meant the absence of any testimony

to her being a qualified nurse. As the helplessness of her plight rushed in upon her she trembled. How long must she not expect to wait for employment when she had nothing to speak for her? To go back to nursing would be more difficult than to earn a living in a capacity she had never essayed. And she could wait so short a time for anything, so horribly short a time! She would starve if she did not find something soon!

Buses jogged by her laden with sober-faced men and women, their homes behind them, bound for the avocations that sustained the white elephant of life. Shops already gave evidence of trade, and children with uncovered heads sped along the curb with 'ha'porths o' milk,' or mysterious breakfasts folded in scraps of newspaper. Each atom of the awakening bustle passed her engrossed by its own existence, operated by its separate interests, revolving in its individual world. London looked to her a city without mercy or impulse, populated to brimfulness, and flowing over. Every chink and crevice seemed stocked with its appointed denizens, and the hope of finding bread here

which nobody's hand was clutching appeared presumption.

Eleven o'clock had struck—that is to say, she had been walking for more than three hours—when, espying a card with 'Furnished Room to Let' suspended from a blind, her efforts to gain shelter were successful at last. It was an unpretentious little house, in an equally unpretentious turning, and a sign on the doorway intimated that it was the residence of J. Shuttleworth, mason.

A hard-featured woman, presumably the mason's wife, replied to the dispirited knock, and, confronted by a would-be lodger who was dressed like a lady, immediately added eighteenpence to the rent she habitually required. She asked five shillings a week, and Mary agreed to it instanter, and was grateful.

'About your meals, miss?' said Mrs. Shuttleworth, when Miss Brettan had sunk on to a straight-up chair which divided with a truckle-bedstead the accommodation for repose. 'Dinners I can't do for yer, nor would I promise it; but brekfus and so far as a cup o' tea goes in the even-

ing, why, you can 'ave a bit of something brought up when we takes our own. I suppose that'll suit you, won't it?'

'A cup of tea and some bread-and-butter,' answered Mary, 'in the morning and afternoon, if you can manage it, will do very nicely, thank you.' She roused herself to the exigencies of the occasion. 'How much will that be?' she questioned.

'Oh, well, we shan't break yer! As to the five shillings: why, the rent we always haves in advance.'

The rent was forthcoming, and one more superfluity in the jostle of existence profited by the misfortunes of another: going back to the wash-tub buoyant.

Upstairs the lodger remained motionless; she was so tired that it was a luxury to sit still, and for awhile she was more alive to the bodily relief than the mental burden. It was afternoon by the time she faced the necessity of returning to St. Pancras for her bag, and, pushing up the rickety window to let in some air during her absence, she

proceeded to explore the lower regions to ascertain the nearest route.

She learnt she was much nearer to the station than she had supposed, and after a brief excursion had her property in her possession again. Her head felt oddly light, and she was puzzled by the dizziness until she remembered she had had nothing to eat since eight o'clock. The thought of food was sickening, though, and it was not till five o'clock, when the tea was furnished, with a hunch of bread, and a slap of butter in the middle of a plate, that she attempted to break her fast.

And now ensued a length of dreary hours, an awful purposeless evening, of which every minute was weighted with despair. Fortunately the weather was not very cold, so the absence of a fire was less a hardship than a lack of company; but the fatigue, which had been acting as a partial opiate to her trouble, gradually passed, and her brain ached with the torture of reflection.

With nothing to do but to think, she sat in the upright chair, staring at the empty grate, and picturing Tony during the familiar 'waits' at the

theatre. An evil-smelling lamp flickered despondently on the table; outside, the street was discordant with the cries of children. To realize that it was only this morning the blow had fallen upon her was impossible; an interval of several days appeared to roll between the poky attic and her farewell. The calamity seemed already old. 'Oh, Tony!' she murmured. She got his likeness out. 'Yours ever'—the mockery of it! She did not hate him, she did not even tell herself she did; she contemplated the faded 'cabinet' quite gently, and held it before her a long time. It had been taken in Manchester, and she recalled the afternoon it was done. All sorts of trivialities in connection with it recurred to her. He was wearing a lawn tie, and she remembered it had been the last clean one and had got mislaid. Their search for it, and comic desperation at its loss, all came back to her quite clearly. 'Oh, Tony!' Her fancies projected themselves into his future, and she saw him in a score of different scenes, but always famous, and in his greatness with the memory of Mary flitting across his mind. Then she wondered what she

would have done if she had borne him a child; whether the child would have been in the garret with her. But no, if he had been a father this would not have happened. He was always fond of children; to have given him a child of his own would have kept his love for her aglow.

Presently a diversion was effected by the home-coming of Mr. Shuttleworth, evidently drunk, and abusing his wife with disjointed violence. Next the woman's voice arose shrieking recrimination, the babel subsiding amid staccato passages, alternately gruff and shrill, until silence reigned once more.

The disturbance tended to obtrude the practical side of her dilemma, and the vital importance of speedily obtaining work of some sort, no matter what, appalled her. To-day was Wednesday, and on the Wednesday following, unless she was to go forth homeless, there would be the lodging to pay for again, and the breakfasts and teas supplied in the meanwhile. She would have to spend money outside as well; she had to dine, however poorly, and there were postage-stamps, and perhaps train fares, to be considered: some of the advertisers she

answered might live beyond walking distance. Altogether, she certainly required a pound. And she had towards it—with a sinking of the heart she turned out her purse to make certain—exactly two and ninepence.

CHAPTER III.

NEXT morning her efforts were begun. It rained, and she commenced to understand what it means to the unemployed to tramp a city where two days out of every four are wet.

To purchase some papers, and examine them at home, was out of the question; but she was aware there were news-rooms where for a penny she could see them all. Directed to such an institution by a speckled boy, conspicuous for his hat and ears, she found several despondent-looking women turning over a heap of periodicals at a table. The 'dailies' were spread upon stands against the walls, and at a smaller table under the window lay a number of slips, with pens and ink, for the convenience of customers wishing to make memoranda of the vacant situations. She went first to the

Times, because it was on the stand nearest to her, and proceeded from one paper to another until she had made a tour of the lot.

The 'Wanted' columns were of the customary order; the needy endeavouring to gull the necessitous with specious phrases, and the well-established prepared to sweat them without any disguise at all. A drapery house had a vacancy for a young woman 'to dress fancy window, and able to trim hats, etc., when desired'—salary fifteen pounds. There was a person seeking a general servant who would be willing to pay twenty pounds a year for the privilege of doing the work. This advertisement was headed 'Home offered to a lady,' and a few seconds were required to grasp the stupendous insolence of it. A side-street stationer, in want of a saleswoman, advertised for an 'Apprentice at a moderate premium'; and the usual percentage of City firms dangled the decaying bait of 'An opportunity to learn the trade.' Her knowledge of the glut of experienced actresses enabled her to smile at the bogus theatrical managers who had 'immediate salaried engagements waiting for amateurs of good

appearance'; but some of the 'home employment' swindles took her in, and, discovering nothing better to respond to, she jotted these addresses down.

From the news-room she went into a dairy, and dined on a glass of milk and a bun, whence, after an inevitable outlay on stamps and stationery, she returned to the lodging a shilling poorer than she had gone out.

Unacquainted with the wiles of the impostors she was answering, the thought of her applications sustained her somewhat; it seemed to her that out of the several openings one must be practicable at least. She did not fail to adopt the calculation habitual to all novices under the circumstances; she reduced the promised earnings by half, and believed she was viewing the prospect in a sober light which, if mistaken at all, erred on the side of pessimism.

The envelopes she had enclosed came back to her late the following afternoon, and the circulars varied mainly in colour and the prices of materials for sale. In all particulars essential to prove them

frauds to everybody excepting the perfect fools who must exist to explain the recurrence of the advertisements, they were the same.

With the extinction of the hope, the darkness of her outlook was intensified, and henceforth she eschewed the offers of 'liberal incomes,' and confined her attentions to the illiberal wages. Day after day now she resorted to the news-room—one stray more the proprietor saw regularly—resolved not to relinquish her access to the papers while a coin remained to her to pay for admission. She indited many letters, and spent her evenings vainly listening for the postman's knock. She attributed her repeated failures to there being no mention of references in her replies, which were so concise and nicely written that she felt sure they could not have failed from any other reason. The probability was that her nicely-written notes were never read: merely tossed with scores of others, all unopened, into the wastepaper basket, after a selection had been made from the top thirty. This is the fate of most of the nicely-written notes that go in reply to advertisements in the newspapers, only the

people who compose them, and post them with little prayers, fortunately do not suspect it. If they suspected it, they would lose the twenty-four hours' comfort of hugging a false hope to their souls; and an oasis of hope is a desirable thing at the cost of a postage-stamp.

One evening an answer actually did come, and an answer in connection with a really beautiful 'wanted.' When the epistle was handed to her, she had hardly dared to hope it related to that particular situation at all. The advertisement had run:

'Secretary required by a Literary Lady. Must be sociable, and have no objection to travel on the Continent. Apply in own handwriting to C. B., care of Messrs. Furnival,' etc.

The signature, however, was not 'C. B.'s.' The communication was from Messrs. Furnival. They wrote that they judged by Miss Brettan's application she would suit their client; and on receipt of half a crown—their usual booking fee—they would forward the authoress's address.

If she had had half a crown to send, she might

not have done the thing she did; as it was, instead of remitting to Messrs. Furnival's office, she called there.

It proved to be a very small and very dark back room on the ground-floor, and Messrs. Furnival were represented by a stout gentleman of shabby apparel and mellifluous manner. Mary began by saying she was the applicant who had received his letter about 'C. B.'s' advertisement; but as this announcement did not seem sufficiently definite to enable the stout gentleman to converse on the subject with fluency and freedom, she added that 'C. B.' was a literary lady who stood in need of a secretary.

On this he became very vivacious indeed. He told her that her chance of securing the post was an excellent one. No, it was not a certainty, as she appeared to have understood; but he did not think she had much occasion for misgivings. Her speed in shorthand was in excess of the rate for which their client had stipulated.

She said: 'Why, I especially stated that if shorthand was essential I should be no use.'

He said: 'So you did. I meant to say, your type-writing was your recommendation.'

'Mr. Furnival,' she exclaimed, 'I wrote, "I am neither a type-writer nor stenographer"! You must be confusing me with someone else. Perhaps you have answered another application as well?'

Perhaps he had.

'You are my first experience of an applicant for a secretaryship who hasn't learnt type-writing *or* shorthand,' he said in an injured tone. 'Of course, since you don't know either, you'd be no good at all—positively not the slightest!'

'Then,' she said, 'why did you ask me to send you half a crown?'

Before he could spare time to enlighten her as to his reason for this line of action, they were interrupted by an urchin who dashed in and deposited an armful of letters on the table. The mellifluous one acknowledged the attention airily, and she came away wondering what percentage of the women it was Messrs. Furnival's mistake to suppose would 'suit their client' enclosed postal-orders to pay the 'fee.'

Quite ineffectually she visited some legitimate agencies, and once she walked to Battersea in time to learn that the berth which was the object of her journey had just been filled. Even when one walks to Battersea, and dines for twopence, however, the staying-powers of two-and-nine are very limited; and the dawning of the dreaded date for Mrs. Shuttleworth's account found her capital exhausted.

Among her scanty possessions, the only article she could suggest converting into money was the silver watch which she wore attached to a guard. It had belonged to her as a girl; she had worn it as a nurse; it had travelled with her on tour throughout her life with Carew. What a pawnbroker would lend her on it she did not know, but she supposed a sovereign. Had she been better off, she would have supposed two sovereigns, for she was as ignorant of its value as of the method of pledging it; but being destitute, a pound seemed to her a presumptuous amount to ask for anything. She made her way heavily into the street. She felt as if her errand were imprinted on her face,

and when she reached and paused beneath the sign of the golden balls, she fancied all the passers-by were watching her.

The window offered a pretext for hesitation—a prelude to the entry. She remained inspecting the collection behind the glass; perhaps anyone who saw her go in might imagine it was with the intention of buying something. She was nerving herself to the necessary pitch when, giving a final glance over her shoulder, she saw a bystander looking in her direction. Her courage took flight, and, feeling inexpressibly mean, she sauntered on, deciding to explore for a shop in a more secluded position.

Though she was ashamed of her retreat, the respite was a relief to her, and it was not until the next emporium was gained that she perceived the longer she delayed the critical moment the more embarrassing it would become. She went hurriedly in. There was a row of narrow doors extending down a passage, and, pulling one open, she found the tiny compartment occupied by a woman and a bundle. Starting back, she essayed

the next partition, which proved vacant; and standing away from the counter, lest her profile should be detected by her neighbour in distress, she waited for someone to come to her.

Nobody taking any notice, she rapped to attract attention. A young man lounged along, and she put the watch down.

'How much?' he said.

'A pound.'

He caught it up and withdrew, conveying the impression that he thought very little of it. She thought very little of it herself directly it was in his hand. His hand was a masterpiece of expression, whereas his voice never wavered from two notes.

'Ten shillings,' he said, reappearing.

'Ten shillings is very little,' she murmured. 'Surely it is worth more than that?'

'Going to take it?'

He slid the watch across to her.

'Thank you,' she said; 'yes.'

A doubt whether it would be sufficient crept over her the instant she had agreed, and she wished she

had declined the offer. To call him back, however, was beyond her, and when he returned it was with the ticket.

'Name and address?'

New to the requirements of a pawnbroker, she stammered the true one: convinced the woman with the bundle would overhear and remember. Even then she was dismayed to find the transaction was not concluded; he asked her for a halfpenny, and, with the blood in her face, she signified she had no change. At length, though, she was free to depart, grasping a rouleau of silver and coppers; and transferring the coins guiltily to her purse, when the shop was too far distant to appear related to the action, she commenced the ordinary programme of her day.

It was striking five when she mounted to the attic, and she saw that Mrs. Shuttleworth, with the punctuality peculiar to cheap landladies when the lodger is out, had already brought up the tray. On the plate was her bill; she snatched at it anxiously, and was relieved to find it ran thus:

	s.	d.
Bred - - - - - -	1	2
Butter - - - - -		10
Milk - - - - - -		3½
Tea - - - - - -		6
Oil - - - - - -		2
Shuger - - - - -		2½
To room til nex Wennesday - -	5	0
	8	2

So far, then, she had been equal to emergencies, and another week's shelter was assured. The garret began to assume almost an air of comfort, refined by her terror of losing it. When she reflected that the week divided her from literal starvation, she cried that she *must* find something to do—never mind what its nature, she must! Then she realized she could find it no more easily because it was a case of 'must' than if it had been simply expedient, and the futility of the feminine 'must,' when she was already doing all she could do, served to accentuate her helplessness. She prayed passionately, without being able to feel much confidence in the efficacy of prayer, and told herself she did not deserve that God should listen to her, because she was guilty, and sinful, and bad. She did

not seek consolation in repeating that it was always darkest before dawn, nor strive to fortify herself with any other of the aphorisms belonging to the vocabulary of sorrow for other people. The position being her own, she looked it straight in the eyes, and admitted the chances were in favour of her being very shortly without a bed to lie upon.

Each night she came a few pence nearer to the end; each night now she sat staring from the window, imagining the sensations of wandering homeless. And at last broke the day—a sunless and chilly day—when she rose and went out possessed of one penny, and without any means of adding to it. This penny might be reserved to diminish the hunger that would seize her presently, or she might give herself a final chance among the newspapers. Having breakfasted, the hunger looked distant, and she decided for the final chance.

As she turned the pages her hands trembled, and for a second the paragraphs swam together under her gaze. The next instant, standing out clearly from the sea of print, she saw an advertisement like the smile of a friend:

'Useful Companion wanted to elderly lady; one with some experience of invalids preferred. Apply personally, between 3 and 5, "Trebartha," N. Finchley.'

Had it been framed for her, it could hardly have suited her better. The wish for personal application itself was an advantage, for in conversation, she felt, the obstacle of having no references could be surmounted with far less trouble than by letter. A string of frank allusions to the difficulty, a dozen easy phrases, leapt into her mind, so that, in fancy, the interview was already in progress, and terminating with pleasant words in the haven of engagement.

She searched no further, and it was not until she was leaving the shop that she remembered the miles she would have to walk. To start so early, moreover, would be useless, so on second thoughts she determined to pass the morning where she was.

She was surprised to discover she was not singular in this decision, and wondered if all the customers who stayed so long had anywhere else

to go. Many of them never turned a leaf, but sat at the table dreamily eyeing a journal as if they had forgotten it was there. She watched the people coming in, noting the unanimity with which they made for the advertisement-sheets first, and speculating as to the nature of the work each sought.

There was a woman garbed in black, dejected and precise; she was a governess, manifestly. Once, when she had been young, and insolent with the courage of youth, she would have mocked a portrait looking as she looked now; there was little enough mockery left in her this morning. She quitted the 'dailies' unrewarded, and proceeded to the table, her thin-lipped mouth set a trifle harder than before. A girl with magenta feathers in her hat bounced in, tracing her way down the columns with a heavy fore-finger, and departing jauntily with a blotted list. This was a domestic servant, Mary understood. A shabby man of sinister expression covered an area of possibilities: a broken-down tutor perhaps, a professional man gone to the bad. He looked like

Mephistopheles in the prompter's clothes, she thought, contemplating him with languid curiosity. The reflections flitted across the central idea while she sat nervously waiting for the hours to pass, and when she considered it was at length time, she asked the newsagent in which direction Finchley lay. She omitted to state she had to walk there, but obtained sufficient information anent a tram-track to guide her up to Hampstead Heath, where of course she could inquire again.

The sun gave no promise of shining, and a raw bleak wind, tossing the rubbish of the gutters into little whirlpools, rendered pedestrianism exceedingly unpleasant. She was dismayed to find how long a journey she was bound on, arriving at the tram-terminus already fatigued, and then ascertaining she had not covered half the route. Finchley was nothing but a name to her, and steadily pushing on along a hedge-bound road which unrolled itself before her feet with never-changing pertinacity, she began to fear she would never reach her goal at all. To add to the discomfort, it commenced to snow slightly, and she grew less and less sanguine with

every hundred yards. The vision of the smiling lady, the buoyancy of her own glib sentences, faded from her, and the thought of the utter abjectness that would come of refusal made the salvation of acceptance appear much too wonderful to occur.

When at last she reached it, 'Trebartha' proved to be a stunted villa in red brick, of 'an architecture expressive merely of the impotence of the architect to express anything.' It was one of a row, each of the other stunted villas being similarly endowed with a name befitting an estate; and suspense, as is the habit of it, catching discouragement from the most extraneous detail, Mary's heart sank as the housemaid disclosed the badly-lighted passage.

She was ushered into the sitting-room; and the woman who entered presently had been suggested by it. She seemed the natural complement of the haggard prints, of the four cumbersome chairs in a line against the wall, of the family Bible on the crochet tablecover. She wore silk, dark and short, over side-spring boots; plain, save for three narrow

bands of velvet at the hem. She wore a gold watch-chain hanging round her neck, garlanded over her portly bosom. She said she was the invalid lady's married daughter, and her tone implied a consciousness of that higher merit which the woman whose father has left her comfortably off feels over the woman whose father hasn't.

'You have called about my mother's advertisement for a companion?' she said.

'Yes; I have had a long experience of nursing. I think I should be able to do all you want.'

'Have you ever lived as companion?'

'No,' said Mary, 'I have never done that, but'—she essayed a tentative lightness—'I think I am companionable; I don't fancy I am difficult to get on with.'

'What was your—won't you sit down?—what was your last place?'

Mary moistened her lips.

'I am,' she said, 'rather awkwardly situated. I may as well tell you at once I am a stranger here, and, do you know, I find that a great bar in the way of my getting employment. Not being known,

I have of course no friends I can refer people to, and—well, people always seem to think the fact of being a stranger in a city is rather a discreditable thing. I have found that. They do.' She looked for a gleam of response in the stolid countenance, but it was as void of expression as the furniture. 'As I say, I have had a lengthy experience of nursing; as a companion in whom knowledge like that is desired, I—it sounds conceited—but I should be exceedingly useful. It is just the thing I am fitted for.'

The married daughter asked: 'You have been a nurse, you say? But not here?'

'Not here,' said Mary, 'no. Of course,' she added, 'that doesn't detract from——'

'Oh, quite so. We have had several young women here already to-day. Do I understand you to mean there is no one you can give as your reference?'

'Yes, that is, unfortunately enough, the case. I do hope you don't consider it an insuperable obstacle. You know you take servants without "characters" sometimes when——'

'I *never* take a servant without a "character."

I have never done such a thing in my life. Really!'

'I did not mean you personally,' said Mary, with hasty deprecation; 'I was speaking——'

'I am most particular on the point; my mother is most particular, too.'

'Generally speaking. I meant people do take servants without "characters" occasionally when they are hard pushed.'

'Our servants are only too wishful to remain with us. My mother has had her present cook eight years, and her last one was only induced to leave because a very respectable young man—a young man in quite a fair way of business—made her an offer of marriage. She had been here even longer than eight years—twelve I think it was, or thirteen. It was believed at the time that what first attracted the young man's attention to her was the many years my mother had retained her in our household. I am sure there are no circumstances under which my mother would consent to receive a young person who could give no proof of her trustworthiness and good conduct.'

'Do you mean, madam, that you cannot engage me? It—it is a matter of life and death to me,' exclaimed Mary; 'pray let me see the lady!'

'Your manner,' said the married daughter, 'is strange. Quite authoritative for your position.' She rose. 'You will find it helpful to be less haughty when you speak, less opinionated; your manner you will find is very much against you. Oh, my word! no violence, if you please, miss.'

'Violence?' gasped Mary; 'I am not violent. It was my last hope, that's all, and it is over. I wish you good-day, madam.'

So much had happened in a few minutes—inside and out—that the roads were rapidly whitening when she issued from 'Trebartha,' and the flutter of the snowflakes had developed into a steady fall. She was at first scarcely sensible of it; the desperation in her heart kept out the cold, and carried her along for a while in a semi-rush. Words broke from her breathlessly. She felt that she had fallen from a high estate; that the independence of her life with Carew had been a period of dignity and power; that erstwhile she could have awed the

dull-witted philistine who had humbled her. 'The hateful woman! Oh, the wretch! To have to sue to a creature like that!' Well, she would starve now, she supposed, her excitement spending itself; she would die of starvation, like characters in fiction, or the people one read of in the newspapers—the newspapers called it 'exposure,' but it was the same thing; 'exposure' sounded less offensive to the other people who read about it, that was all. The force of education is so strong that, much as she insisted on such a death, and close as she had approached to it, she was unable to realize its happening to her. She told herself it must. The world was of a sudden horribly wide and empty; but for Mary Brettan to actually die like that had an air of exaggeration about it still. Trudging forward, she pondered on it, and the fact came nearer; the sensation of the world's widening about her grew stronger. She felt alone in the midst of illimitable space. There seemed nothing but air around her, nothing tangible, nothing to catch at. Oh, God! how tired she was, and how weak! She could not go on much farther.

The snow whirled against her in wind-driven gusts, clinging to her hair, and filling her eyes and nostrils. Her exhaustion was overpowering her, and still how many miles? Each of the benches she passed along the path was a fresh temptation, and at last she dropped on one, too tired to stand up, wet and shivering, and shielding her face from the storm.

She dropped upon it like any tramp or stray. Having held out to the uttermost, she did not know whether she would ever get up again—did not think about it, and did not care. Her limbs ached for relief, and she seized it on the highroad, because relief on the highroad was the only sort attainable.

And it was while she cowered there that another figure appeared in the twilight, the figure of a tall old man carrying a black bag. He came briskly down a footpath behind her, gazing to right and left as for something that should be waiting for him. Not seeing it, he whistled, and, the whistle announcing his proximity, Mary looked up, seeing him and a trap backed from the corner of the road

simultaneously. The man with the bag stared at her, and after an interval of hesitation spoke.

'It's a dirty nicht,' he said, 'for ye tae be sittin' there. I'm thinkin' ye're no' weel?'

'Not very,' she said.

He inspected her undecidedly.

'An' ye'll tak' your death o' cold if ye dinna get up, it's verra certain. Hoots! ye're shakin' wi' it noo! Bide a wee, an' I'll put some warmth intae ye, young leddy.'

Without any more ado, he deposited the bag at her side, proceeding to open it. And, astonishing to relate, the black bag was fitted with a number of little bottles, one of which he extracted with a glass.

'Is it medicine?' she asked wonderingly.

'Medicine?' he echoed; 'nae, it's nae medicine; it's "Four Diamonds S.O.P." I'm gi'en ye. It's a braw sample o' Pilcher's S.O.P., ma lassie, nothin' finer in the trade, on the honour o' Macpheerson. Noo ye drink that doon; it's speerit, an' it'll dae ye guid.'

She followed his advice, gulping the yellow liquid while he watched her approvingly. Its strength

diffused itself through her frame in ripples of heat, raising her courage, and yet, oddly enough, making her want to cry.

Mr. Macpherson contemplated the bottle solemnly, shaking his head at it with something that sounded like a sigh.

'An' whaur may ye be goin'?' he queried, replacing the cork.

'I am going to town,' she answered. 'I was walking home, only the storm——'

'Tae toon? Will ye no' ha'e a lift along o' me an' the lad? I'll drive ye intae toon.'

'Have you to go there?' she asked, overjoyed.

'There'd be th' de'il tae pay if Macpheerson stayed awa'. Ay, I ha'e tae gang there, and as fast as the mare can trot. Will ye let me help ye in?'

'Yes,' she said, 'I will; I thank you very much for the offer.'

He hoisted her up, struggling in after her, and she and her strange companion, accompanied by an impassible urchin who never uttered a word, started smartly in the direction of the City.

'I am so greatly obliged to you,' she murmured,

rejoicing at the unexpected comfort in which she found herself, 'you don't know!'

'There's nae call for ony obleegation; it's verra welcome ye are. I'm thinkin' the sample did ye a lot o' guid, eh?'

'It did indeed,' replied Mary; 'it has made me feel a different woman.'

'Eh, but it's a gran' speerit!' said the old gentleman with reviving ardour. 'There's nae need to speak for it, an' that's a fact; your ain tongue sings its perfection to ye as ye sup it doon. Ye may get ither houses to serve ye cheaper,' he continued, after a pause, 'I'm no' denyin' that; but tae them that can place the rale article there's nae house like Pilcher's. And Pilcher's best canna be beaten in the trade. I ha'e nae interest tae lie tae ye, ye ken, nor could I tak' ye in wi' the wines and speerits had I the mind. There's the advantage wi' the wines and speerits; ye canna deceive! Ye ha'e the sample, an' ye ha'e the figure—will I book the order or will I no'?'

'It is your business then, Mr.—Macpherson?'

'Will ye no' tak' my card?' he said, producing

a large pasteboard; 'there, put it awa'. Should ye ever be in need, ma lassie, a line to Macpheerson, care o' the firm's address——'

'How kind of you!' she exclaimed.

'No' a bit,' he said; 'ye never can tell what may happen, and whether it's for yersel' ye need it, or a recommendation, ye'll ken ye're buying at the wholesale price.'

She glanced at him with surprise, looked away again, and they drove along for several minutes in silence.

'Maybe ye ken some family whaur I'd be likely tae book an order noo?' remarked Mr. Macpherson incidentally at length. 'Sherry! dae ye no' ken o' a family requirin' sherry? I can dae them sherry at a figure that'll tak' th' breath frae them. Ye canna suspect the profit—th' weecked ineequitous profit—that sherry's retailed at; wi' three quotations tae the brand often eno', an' a made-up wine at that. Noo, I could supply your frien's wi' "Crossbones"—the finest in the trade, on the honour of Macpheerson—if ye happen tae ha'e ony who——'

'I don't,' she said, 'happen to have any.'

'There's the family whaur ye're workin', we'll say; a large family maybe, wi' a cellar. For a large family tae be supplied at the wholesale figure——'

'I am sorry, but I don't work.'

'Ye don't work, an' ye ha'e no frien's!' he peered at her curiously; 'then, ma dear young leddy, ye'll no' think me impertinent if I ax ye how th' de'il ye live?'

The wild idea shot into her brain that perhaps he might be able to put her into the way of something—somewhere, somehow.

'I am a stranger in London,' she answered, 'looking for employment, quite alone.'

'Eh,' said Mr. Macpherson, 'that's bad, that's verra bad.'

He whipped up the horse, and after the momentary comment lapsed into reverie. She called herself a fool for her pains, and stared out dumbly across the melancholy fields.

'Whaur aboots are ye stayin'?' he demanded, after they had passed the Swiss Cottage.

She told him.

'Please don't let me take you out of your way,' she said.

'Ye're no' verra far frae ma ain house,' he declared. 'Ye had best come in an' warm before ye gang on hame. Ye are in nae hurry, I suppose?'

'No, but——'

'Oh, the mistress will nae mind it. Ye just come in wi' me.'

Their conversation progressed by fits and starts until her conductor's domicile was reached, and leaving the trap to the care of the immovable youth, who might have been a mute for any indication he had given to the contrary, she suffered herself without demurring again to be led into a parlour, where a kettle steamed invitingly on the hob.

Mr. Macpherson was greeted by a little woman, evidently the wife referred to, and a rosy offspring, addressed as Charlotte, brought her progenitor a pair of slippers. His introduction of Mary to his family circle was brief.

'Tis a young leddy,' he said, 'I gave a lift to. But I dinna ken your name?'

'My name is Brettan,' she replied. Then, turning to the woman: 'Your husband was so kind as to save me walking home from Finchley, and now he has made me come in with him.'

'It was a braw nicht for a walk,' opined Macpherson.

'I'm sure I'm glad to see you, miss,' responded the woman in cheery Cockney. 'Come to the fire and dry yourself a bit, do!'

The initial awkwardness was as slight as might be. Mary's experiences in the stage-world were serviceable, for no better training than a sojourn in Bohemia exists to guide the footsteps over social hillocks. The people were well-intentioned, too, and, meeting no embarrassment to hamper their heartiness, grew speedily at ease. It reminded the guest of some of her arrivals on tour, one in particular: when, the last week's company not having left yet, she and Tony had traversed half Oldham in search of rooms, finally sitting down with their preserver to bread and cheese in her kitchen. It

was loathsome how Tony would keep recurring to her, and always in episodes when he had been jolly and affectionate.

'Your husband tells me he is in the wine business,' she observed at the tea-table.

'He is, miss; and never you marry a man who travels in that line,' returned his partner, 'or the best part of your life you won't know for rights if you're married or not!'

'He is away a good deal, you mean?'

'Away! He's just home about two months in the year—a fortnight at the time, that's what he is! All the rest of it traipsing about from place to place like a wandering gipsy. Charlotte says time and again, "Ma, have I got a pa, or 'aven't I?"—don't yer, Charlotte?'

'Pa's awful!' said Charlotte, with her mouth full of bread-and-marmalade. 'Never mind, pa, you can't help it!'

'Eh, it's a sad pursuit!' rejoined her father gloomily. In the glow of his own fireside Mary was amazed to perceive his enthusiasm for his 'wines and speerits' had wholly vanished. 'Awa'

frae your wife an' bairn, pandering tae th' veecious courses that ruin the immortal soul! Every heart kens its ain bitterness, young leddy; and Providence in its mysteerious wisdom never designed me for the wine-and-speerit trade.'

'Oh lor,' said Charlotte, 'ma's done it!'

'It was na your mither,' said Mr. Macpherson; 'it's ma ain conscience, as well ye ken! Dae I no' see the travellers themselves succumb tae th' cussed sippin' and tastin' frae mornin' till nicht? There was Burbage, I mind weel, and there was Broun; guid men both—no better men on th' road. Whaur's Burbage noo—whaur's Broun?'

'Fly away, Peter; fly away, Paul!' interpolated Charlotte.

'Gone!' continued Mr. Macpherson, responding to his own inquiry with morbid unction. 'Deed! The Lord be praised, I ha'e the guid sense tae withstand th' infeernal tipplin' masel'. Mony's the time, when I'm talkin' tae a mon in the way o' business, ye ken, I turn the damned glass upside down when he is na lookin'. But there's the folk I sell tae, an' the ithers; what o' them? It's ma

trade to praise the evil—tae tak' it into the world, spreadin' it broadcast for the destruction o' mankind. Eh, ma responsibeelity is awfu' tae contemplate!'

'I am sure, James, you mean most noble,' said the little woman weakly. 'Come, light your pipe comfortable, now; and don't worrit, there's a dear good man!'

The traveller waved the pipe aside; viewed as the type of consolation, he declined it.

'There's a still sma' voice,' he said, 'ye canna' silence wi' 'bacca; ye canna' silence it wi' herbs nor wi' fine linen. It's wi' me noo, axin' queestions. It says: "Macpheerson, how dae ye justeefy thy wilfu' conduct? Why dae ye gloreefy the profeets o' th' airth above thy speeritual salvation, mon? Dae ye no ken that orphans are goin' dinnerless through thy eloquence, an' widows are prodigal wi' curses on a' thy samples an' thy ways?" I canna' answer. There are nichts when the voice will na' let me sleep, ye're weel aware; there are nichts——'

'There are nights when you are most trying, James, I know.'

'Woman, it's the warnin' voice that comes tae a sinner in his transgreession! Are there no' viseetations eno' about me, an' dae I no' turn ma een frae them; hardenin' ma heart, and pursuin' ma praise o' Pilcher's wi' a siller tongue? There was a mon ane day at the Peacock—a mon in ma ain inseedious line—an' he swilled his bottle o' sherry, an' he called for his whusky-an'-watter, and he got up on his feet speechifyin', after the commercial dinner. "The Queen, gentlemen!" he cries, liftin' his glass; an' wi' that he dropped deed, wi' the name o' the royal leddy on his lips! He was a large red mon—he would ha' made twa o' me!'

The circumference of the deceased appeared to be regarded by the traveller as an additional omen. He extended his arms in representation of it, and waved them aloft as if to intimate that Charlotte might detect Nemesis in his own vicinity preparing for a swoop.

'You take the thing too seriously,' said Mary. 'Nine people out of ten have to be what they can, you know; it is only the tenth who can afford to be what he wishes.'

The little woman inquired what her calling was.

'I am very sorry to say I have none,' she answered. 'I am doing nothing.'

There was the instant's restraint that always falls in working circles when one of the company admits to not having any work.

'Unfortunately I know nobody here,' she added; 'it is very hard to get anything when there is no one to speak for you.'

'It must be; but, lor! you must bear up. It's a long lane that has no turning, as they say.'

'Only there is no telling where the turning may lead; a lane is better than a bog.'

'Wouldn't she do for Pattenden's?' suggested the woman musingly.

'For whom?' exclaimed Mary. 'Do you think I can get something? Who are they?'

'James?'

'Pattenden's?' he repeated. 'An' what would she dae at Pattenden's?'

'Why, be agent, to be sure—same as you were!'

Mary glanced from one to the other with anxiety.

'Weel, noo, that isn't at a' a bad idea,' said Mr. Macpherson meditatively; 'dae ye fancy ye could sell books, young leddy, on commeession—a haufsovereign, say, for every order ye took? I'm thinkin' a young woman micht dae a verra fair trade at it.'

'Oh yes,' she replied; 'I am certain I could. Half a sovereign each one? Where do I go? Will they take me?'

'I dinna anteecipate ye'll fin' much deefficulty aboot them takin' ye: they dinna risk onythin' by that! I'll gi'e ye the address. They are publishers, and ye just ax for their Mr. Collins when ye go there; tell him ye're wishful tae represent them wi' ane o' their publeecations. If ye like I'll write your name on ane o' ma ain cards; an' ye can send it in tae him.'

'Do!' she said; and he wrote 'Introducing Miss Brettan' on the back of another of his extensive pasteboards.

'Ye must na' imagine it's a fortune ye'll be makin',' he observed; 'it's different tae ma ain position wi' the wines an' speerits, ye ken: wi'

Pilcher's it's a fixed salary, an' Pilcher's pay ma expenses.'

'Pilcher's pay *our* expenses!' affirmed Charlotte the thoughtful.

'They dae,' acquiesced the traveller; 'there's a sicht o' saving oot o' sax-and-twenty shillin's a day tae an economical parent. But wi' Pattenden's it's precarious; ane week guid, an' anither week bad.'

'I am not afraid,' declared Mary boldly; 'whatever I do, it is better than nothing. I'll go there to-morrow, the first thing. Very many thanks; and to you, too, Mrs. Macpherson, for thinking of it.'

'I'm sure I'm glad I did,' replied the little body with a laugh; 'there's no saying but what you may be doing first-rate after a bit. It's a beginning for you, any way.'

'That it is, and am I not glad I met you! But why cannot the publishers allow a salary?' after a pause, 'the same as your husband's firm?'

'Ah! they don't; anyhow, not at the beginning. Besides, James has been with Pilcher's ten years

now; he wasn't earning so much when he started in the line.'

''Spect one reason that they don't is because such a heap more people buy spirits than books!' said Charlotte. 'Pa!'

'Eh, ma lassie?'

'The lady's going to be an agent——'

'Weel?'

'Then, dear pa,' said Charlotte, 'won't we all drink to the lady's luck in a sample?'

'Ye veecious midget,' ejaculated her father wrathfully, 'are ye no' ashamed tae mak' sic a proposeetion! Ye'll no drink a sample, will ye, young leddy?'

'I will not indeed!' answered Mary.

'No' but what ye're welcome.'

'Thanks,' she said; 'I will not, really.'

'Eh, but ye will, then,' he exclaimed; 'a sma' sample, ye an' Mrs. Macpheerson th'gither! Whaur's ma bag?'

In spite of her protestations he now drew a bottle out, and the hostess produced a couple of glasses from the cupboard.

'Port!' he said. 'The de'il's liquors a' o' them; but, if there's a disteenction, maybe a wee drappie o' the "Four Grape Balance" deserves mon's condemnation least!' His conflicting emotions delayed the toast some time. 'The de'il's liquors!' he groaned again, fingering the bottle irresolutely. 'Eh, but it's the "Four Grape Balance,"' he murmured with reluctant admiration, eyeing the sample against the light. 'There! Ye may baith o' ye drink it doon! But masel', I wouldna touch a drap. An' as for ye, ye wee Cockney bairn, if I catch ye tastin' onything stronger than tea in a' your days, or knowin' the flavour o' the perneecious stuff it's your affleected father's duty tae lure the unsuspeecious minds wi'—temptin' the frail tae their eternal ruin, an' servin' the de'il when his sicht is on the Lord—I'll leather ye!'

Charlotte giggled nervously—Figaro-wise, that she might not be obliged to weep—while Mrs. Macpherson, raising the glass to her lips, said 'Luck!'

'Luck!' they all echoed.

And Mary, conscious the career would be no

heroic one, was also conscious she was not a heroine. 'I am,' she said to herself, 'just a real unhappy woman, in very desperate straits. Wherefore let me do whatever offers itself, and be profoundly grateful if anything can be done at all.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE wealth of Messrs. Pattenden and Sons—which runs into figures exceptional even among publishing firms—is not indicated by the arrangement of their London branch. A flight of narrow stairs, none too clean, leads to a pair of doors respectively painted 'Warehouse' and 'Private'; and having performed the superfluous ceremony of knocking at the former, Mary found herself in front of a rough counter, behind which two or three young men were busily engaged in stacking books. There were books in profusion, books in virginity, books tempting and delightful to behold. Volume upon volume, crisp in cover and shiny of edge, they were piled on table and heaped on floor, and the young men handled them with as little concern as if they had been grocery. Such is the force of habit.

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In response to her inquiry, her name and the card were despatched to Mr. Collins by a miniature boy endowed with a gape that threatened to lift his head off, and, pending the interview, she attempted to subdue her nervousness.

A man with a satchel bustled in, and made hurried reference to 'Vol. two of the Dic.' and 'The fourth of the Ency.' Against the window an accountant with a fresh complexion and melancholy mien totted up columns in a ledger.

Seeing that everybody — the melancholy accountant not excepted—favoured her with a gratified stare, she concluded the weaker sex were unfrequently employed here, and trembled with the fear that her application might be refused. She assured herself the Scotchman would never have spoken so confidently of a favourable issue if it had not been reasonable to expect it, but the doubt having entered her head, it was difficult to dispel, and she began reflecting how she could astonish the melancholy one by telling him she was on the brink of destitution. The perspiring 'packers,' sure of their dinners by-and-by, looked to her indi-

viduals to be felicitated on their prosperity, and, hopeless young wretches as they were, it is a fact that a person's lot is seldom so poor but that another person worse off can be found to envy it. The book-keeper who has grown haggard in the firm's employ at a couple of pounds a week is the envy of the clerk who lives on eighteen shillings, and the wight who sweeps the office daily thinks how happy he would be in the place of the clerk. The urchin who hawks matches in the rain envies the sheltered office-boy, and the waif without coppers to invest envies the match-seller. The grades of misery are so infinite, and the instinct of envy is so ingrained, that when two vagrants lying under a bridge have drawn their belts as tight as they will meet to still the gnawings of their hunger, one of the pair will find something to be envious of in the rags of the outcast blaspheming at his side.

Messrs. Pattenden's youngster reappeared, and, with a yawn so tremendous that it eclipsed his previous effort said:

'Miss Brettan!'

Mr. Collins was seated in a compartment just large enough to contain a desk and two chairs. He signed Mary to the vacant one, and gave her a steady glance of appreciation. A man who had risen to the position of conducting the travelling department of a firm who published on the subscription plan, he was necessarily a reader of temperament; a man who had risen to the position by easy stages while yet young, he was kindly, and had not lost his generosity on the way.

'Good-morning,' he said; 'what is there I can do for you?'

'I want to represent you with one of your publications,' she answered. 'Mr. Macpherson was good enough to offer me the introduction, and he thought you would be able to arrange with me.' The nervousness was scarcely visible. She had entered well, and spoke without hesitancy, in a musical voice. All these things Mr. Collins noted. Before she had explained her desire he had wished she might have it. The book-agent is of many types, and skilful advertisements hinting at noble earnings, without being explicit about the nature of

the pursuit, had brought penurious professional men and reduced gentlewoman on to the chair Mary occupied time and again. But these applicants had generally cooled visibly when the requirements of the vocation were insinuated, and here was one, as refined as any of them, who came comprehending she would have to canvass, and prepared to do it. Mr. Collins nearly rubbed his hands.

'What experience have you had?' he asked.

'In—as an agent? None! But I suppose with a fair amount of intelligence that is hardly an obstacle?'

'Not at all.' For once in his life he was almost at a loss. As a rule it was he who advocated the attempt, and the novice on the chair who grew reluctant.

'I take it,' said Miss Brettan, concealing rapture, 'that the art of the business is to sell books to people who don't want to buy them? There it is in a nutshell, eh?'

'Precisely; tact, and the ability to talk about your specimen, is what is wanted. Always watch the face of the person you are showing it to, and don't look at

the specimen itself. You must know that by heart.'

'Oh!'

'Supposing you're showing an encyclopedia: as you turn over the plates, you should be able to tell by his eyes when you have come to one that illustrates a subject he is interested in; then talk about that subject—how fully it is dealt with, etc.'

'I see.'

'If you think he looks like a married man, and is old enough to have a family, mention how useful an encyclopedia is for general reference in a household, how valuable for children going to school when writing essays and things.'

'Are you going to engage me for an encyclopedia?'

He smiled.

'You go ahead, Miss——'

'Brettan. Do I go ahead too quickly?'

'Well, you have to be patient, you know, with possible subscribers. If you "rush" so will they, and the easiest reply to give in a hurry is "No." I'm not sure about sending you out with the "Ency"; after a while, perhaps! How would

you like trying a new work that has never been canvassed, for a beginning?'

'It would be better?'

'Certainly; there is less in it to learn. And you needn't be afraid of hearing "Oh, I have one already!"'

'I didn't think of that. What is the new work, Mr. Collins?'

He touched a bell, and ordered the attendant sprite to bring him a specimen of the "Album."

'Four half-volumes at twelve and sixpence each,' he said, turning to her, '"The Album of Inventions." It gives the history of all the principal inventions, with a brief biography of the inventors. You want to know who invented the watch—look it up under W; the telephone—turn to T. It's a history of the progress of science and civilization. "The origin of the inventions, and the voids they fill," that's the idea. Ah, here we have it!—Thanks, Saunders.—Now look through that, and tell me if you believe you could do any good with it.'

She took a slim crimson-bound book from its case, and found it what he had described.

'I decidedly believe I could,' she averred; 'I should like to try, anyhow.'

'Very well,' he returned; 'you shall be the first agent to canvass the "Album" for us.'

'And how about terms?' she questioned.

'The terms, Miss Brettan, ought to be to you in a very little while about five or six pounds a week. You may do more; we have travellers with us who are making their twenty. But for a start say five or six.'

'You mean that would be my commencing salary?' she queried calmly.

'No, not as salary,' he rejoined, carelessly also; 'I mean your commissions would amount to that.' From his tone one would have supposed formality obliged him to distinguish between the sources of income, but that it was practically a distinction without a difference. 'We allow on every order you bring us for the "Album" half a guinea. Saturdays you need not go out—it's a bad day, especially to catch professional men, with whom you'll do best with this. But saying you make twelve calls on each of the five others, and out of

every dozen calls you book two orders (which experience proves to be the reliable calculation), there is your five guineas a week for you as regular as clockwork. I'll tell you what I'll do: just give me a receipt for the specimen and go home this morning and study it. To-morrow come in to me again at ten o'clock, and every day I'll make out a short list for you of people who have already been subscribers of ours for some work or another. I can pick out addresses that lie close together, and then you'll have the advantage of knowing you are waiting on buyers, and not wasting your time.'

'Thank you very much,' she said.

'Here is the order-book. You see they have to fill up a form. Every one you bring filled-in means half a guinea to you. You have no further trouble —a deliverer takes the volumes round, and collects the money. Just get the order signed, and your part of the responsibility is over. Is that all right?'

'That's all right.'

He rose and shook hands with her.

'At ten o'clock,' she repeated. 'So long!'

She descended the dirty stairs excitedly. The

aspect of the world had changed for her in a quarter of an hour. And to think she would never have dreamt of trying Pattenden's, never have heard of the occupation, if she had not met Mr. Macpherson, had not gone to Finchley, had not been so tired that, having parted with her last penny at the news-room——

The remembrance of her present penury, which the interview had banished, rushed back to her. With five guineas a week coming in directly, she had no money to go on with in the mean while. To walk about the streets all day without even a biscuit between the scanty meals at home would be quite impossible. She questioned desperately what there remained to her to pawn—what she was to do. Gaining her room, she eyed her little bag of linen forlornly; she did not think she could borrow anything on articles like these, neither could she spare any of them, nor summon up the courage to put them on a counter. Suddenly the inspiration came to her that there was the bag itself. The idea disposed of the difficulty, and when it was growing dusk she acted upon it. This time the

pawnbroker omitted to inquire if she had a half-penny — people who pledge handbags for four shillings are seldom assumed to have one, and he deducted the cost of the ticket from the amount of the loan. Taking the bull by the horns, she next sought out the landlady, and intimated she would be unable to meet the impending bill on presentation, but would settle that and the next together.

'I have found work,' she said, feeling like a housemaid as she made use of the expression. 'If you would not mind letting it stand over——'

Mrs. Shuttleworth dried her fingers on her apron, and agreed with less hesitation than her lodger had dreaded.

Convinced that her 'specimen' was mastered—she had rehearsed two or three little gusts of eulogy which she was assured would sound spontaneous—Miss Brettan now debated the advisability of calling on the Macphersons to inform them of the result of their suggestion. Fearful of intruding, she had half decided to write a note, but with her limited capital the stamp was an object, and she was, besides, uncertain of the number. Accord-

ingly, she determined on the visit, and at eight o'clock proceeded to make it.

The door was opened by Charlotte, and hastily explaining the motive for the call, Mary followed her inside. She found the parlour in a state of wild confusion, and gathered from the trio in a breath that destiny, in the form of Pilcher's, had ordered that the traveller should be torn from the bosom of his family a full week earlier than the severance had been anticipated.

'He's going to Leeds to-morrow,' exclaimed the little woman distractedly, oppressed by an armful of shirts that fell from her one by one as she moved; 'and it wasn't till this afternoon we heard a word of it. Oh dear! oh dear!—How many's that, James?'

''Tis thirty-three,' said the traveller, 'an', as ye weel ken, it should be thirty-sax! I canna perceive the use o' a body havin' thirty-sax shirts if they can never be found.'

'I'm afraid I am in the way,' murmured Mary; 'I just looked in to say it's all satisfactory, and to tell you how much obliged I am. I won't stop.'

'You are not in the way at all.—You've got one on, James: that's thirty-four!—My dear, would you mind counting these shirts for me? I declare my head's going round!'

She held out the bundle feebly in Mary's direction, and, dropping on to her lord and master's box, watched the new-comer's addition with eager eyes, as if she hoped her own arithmetic might be proved at fault.

'Pa has three dozen of 'em,' said Charlotte with momentary pride, 'cos of the trouble of getting 'em washed when he goes about so much. I think, though, you lose 'em on the road, pa.'

'It's a silly thought that's like ye,' returned her parent shortly.—'Young leddy, what dae ye mak' it?'

'There are only thirty-three here,' replied Mary, struggling with a laugh, 'and—and one is thirty-four!'

'Thirty-three,' exclaimed Mr. Macpherson, 'and ane is thirty-four! Twa shirts missin', twa shirts at five and saxpence apiece wasted—lost in the washtub through repreheensible carelessness!' He

sat down on the box by his wife's side, and contemplated her severely. 'Aweel,' he said at length, polite under difficulties, 'an' Collins was agreeable, ye tell me?'

'He was very nice indeed.'

'Hoh!' he sighed, 'ye will na mak' a penny by it. But the pursuit may serve tae occupy ye!'

'Not make a penny by it?' she ejaculated in dismay.

'Don't you mind him,' said his partner; 'he's got the 'ump, that's what's the matter with him.'

'It may serve tae occupy your mind,' repeated Mr. Macpherson funereally; ''tis pleasant walkin' in the fine-weather! Now mind ye, 'oman, I dinna leave withoot ma twa shirts. I canna banish them frae ma memory, an' ye are behoven tae produce them!'

'Bless and save us, James, haven't I rummaged every drawer in the place!'

'I am for ever repleenishing ma wardrobe, an' I am for ever short,' he complained; 'will ye no' look in the keetchen?'

She was absent some time on this errand, and

Charlotte questioned Mary about the details of her interview at Messrs. Pattenden's. She said she knew 'Pa had been with them several years,' so the business could not be so unprofitable as he had just pretended. Appealed to for support, however, her pa sighed again, and from the disjointed comments he let fall was obviously impelled by circumstances towards an unusually pessimistic view of everything that night. He made brief reference to a 'sink o' ineequity,' which was regarded as an allusion to the 'wine and speerit' trade, and, recognising the futility of attempting a graceful retreat, the visitor got up abruptly and wished them good-bye. Mrs. Macpherson joined her in the passage, empty-handed and disconsolate.

'Good-night, miss,' she murmured; 'don't be down in the mouth. Have plenty of cheek, and you'll get along like a house afire! As for me, I'm going back to the kitchen, and mean to stop there.'

At Mary's third step she called to her to come back.

'Never,' she added, 'go and settle down with a

traveller. You're a likely body to fetch 'em, but don't do it!' She jerked her head towards the parlour impressively. 'A good man, my dear, but his shirts were my cross from our wedding-day.'

Mary assured her the warning should be borne in mind, and, expressing a hope that the missing garments might be recovered, left the little person wiping her brow. The remark about her marrying by-and-by, idle as it was, distressed her. Last night also there had been a mention of the possibility, and, knowing she could never be any man's wife, the suggestion shook her painfully. How she had wrecked her life, she reflected, and for a man who had cared nothing for her!

The assertion that he cared nothing for her was bitterer to her soul than the knowledge that she had wrecked her life. To have a love despised is always a keener torture to a woman than to a man; for a woman surrenders herself less easily, thinks the more of what she is bestowing, and counts the treasures at her disposal over and over—ultimately for the sake of delighting in the knowledge of how much she is going to give. If one of the pearls

she has laid so reverently at her master's feet is left to lie there, she exonerates him and accuses herself. But his caresses never quite fill the unsuspected wound. If it happens he neglects them all, then that woman, beggared and unthanked, wonders why the sun shines, and how people can laugh. Some women can take back a misdirected love, erase the superscription, and address it over again. Others cannot. Mary could not. She had lain in Seaton's arms and kissed him; pride bade her be ashamed of the memory; her heart found food in it. It was all over, all terrible, all a thing she ought to shiver and revolt at; but the depth of her devotion had been demonstrated by the magnitude of her sin, and she was not able, because the sacrifice had been misprized, to say, 'Therefore in everything except my misery it shall be as if I had never made it.'

She could not, continually as she put its fever from her, wrench the tenderness out of her being, recall her guilt, and forget its motive. The sin of her life had been caused by her love, and, come weal, come woe, come gratitude or callousness, a

love which had been responsible for such a thing as that was not a sentiment to be plucked out and destroyed at the dictates of common-sense. It was not a thing Carew could kill with baseness. She could have looked him in the face and sworn she hated him; she felt that, whether that were quite true or not, she could at least never touch his hand nor sit in a room with him again. But neither her contempt for him nor for her own weakness could blot out the recollection of the hours of passion, the years of communion, when if one of them had said, 'I should like,' the other had replied, 'Say *we* should!'

It was well for her the exigencies of her situation were supplying anxieties which to a great extent penned her thoughts within more wholesome bounds. On the morrow her chief idea was to distinguish herself on her preliminary excursion. Mr. Collins, true to his promise, had prepared a list for her. The houses were all in the neighbourhood of the Abbey, and mostly, he informed her, the offices of civil engineers. He said civil engineers were a 'likely class' to attempt with the 'Album,' the

principal objection to them being that they were 'so beastly irregular in their movements,' and added that when she had 'worked Westminster' he would start her among barristers and clergymen.

'Come in, when you've done, and tell me how you've got on,' he said pleasantly. 'I suppose you haven't a pocket large enough to hold your specimen? But never mind. Keep it out of sight as much as you can when you ask for people; and ask for them as if you were going to give them a commission to build a bridge.'

She smiled confidently, and, allaying the qualms of peddlery with the balm of prospective riches, on which she could always advertise for other employment should this prove so very uncongenial, proceeded to the office marked '1.'

It was in Victoria Street, and the name of the individual she was to intrude upon was painted among a host of others on a black board at the entrance. She paused and inspected this board rather longer than was necessary, so that a porter in livery asked her whom she wanted? She told

him, 'Mr. Gregory Hatch'; to which he replied, 'Third floor,' evidently with the supposition she would make use of the lift. She profited by this supposition of his, and felt an impostor to commence with. The cognomen of 'Gregory Hatch,' with initials after it which conveyed no meaning to her, confronted her on a door as the lift-man released her; and with a further decrease of ardour, which she persuaded herself she did not feel, she walked quickly in.

There were several young noblemen masquerading as clerks behind a stretch of mahogany, and, perceiving her, one of the aristocracy lounged forward, and descended from his high estate sufficiently to inquire, 'What can I do for yer?' He said 'yer,' but that was doubtless part of his excellent masquerade.

'Is Mr. Hatch in?'

'I'll see,' said the prince; he looked suspiciously at the specimen, and it began to be heavy. She wished it were outside—in her custody.

'Er, what name?'

'Miss Brettan.'

He strolled into the apartment marked 'Private,' and a sickening certainty that, if she were admitted to it, the prince would be summoned directly afterwards to eject her, made her yearn to take flight before he reappeared. She was positively debating what excuse for a hurried departure she could offer to the rest of the royal family, when the door was re-opened, and he requested her to 'step in, please.'

An old gentleman of preoccupied aspect was busy at a desk; he and she were alone in the room.

'Miss—Brettan?' he said interrogatively. 'Take a chair, madam.'

He put his papers down, and waited, she was convinced, for his commission for a bridge. She took the seat he had indicated, because she was too embarrassed to decline it, and immediately felt the act was going to be regarded as an additional piece of impertinence.

'I have called,' she stammered—in her rehearsals she had never practised an introductory speech, and she abominated herself for the omission—'I

have called Mr. ——' his name had suddenly sailed away from her—'with regard to a book I have been desired to show you by Messrs. Pattenden. If you will allow me——'

She drew the specimen from the case and deposited it on the desk before him.

She was relieved to find him much less astonished than she had anticipated. He even fingered the thing tentatively, and she began to collect her wits. To take it into her own hands, however, as in duty bound, and expatiate on its merits leaf by leaf, was beyond her, so she soothed her conscience by remarking it was a very nice book, really.

'It seems so,' said the old gentleman. '"The Album of Inventions," dear me! A new work?'

'Quite,' she said—'very new!' It sounded idiotic to her to keep repeating how new it was, but she could not think of anything else to say.

'Dear me!' reiterated the old gentleman. He appeared to be growing interested by the examination, and it looked within the regions of possibility that he might give an order. Up to that moment all her ambition had been to find

herself in the street again without having been abused.

'The beauty of the work is,' she said, 'er—that it is so pithy. One so frequently wants to know something that one has forgotten about something: who thought of it, and how the other people managed before he did. I am sure, Mr. Pattenden, that if you——'

'Hatch, madam—my name is Hatch!'

'I beg your pardon,' she said—'Mr. Hatch I meant to say! I was about to point out that, should you care to take a copy of it, it is very cheap.'

'And what may be the price?' he asked.

'It is in four volumes at twelve and sixpence,' answered Mary melodiously.

'The four?'

'Oh no—each! Thick volumes they are; do you think it dear?'

'No,' he said; 'oh no!—a very valuable book, I have no doubt.'

'Then perhaps you will give me an order for it?' she inquired, scarcely able to contain her elation.

'No,' he responded sweetly, still perusing an article, 'I will not give an order for it; I have so many books.'

She stared at him in blank disappointment while he read placidly down to the end of a page.

'There,' he said benevolently; 'a capital work! It deserves to sell largely; the publishers should be hopeful of it. The plates are bold, and the matter seems to me of a high degree of excellence. The fault I usually condemn in such illustrations is the mistake of making "pictures" of them, to the detriment of their usefulness, clearness being always the grand desideratum in an illustration of a mechanical contrivance. With this the customary blunder has been avoided; in looking through the specimen I have detected scarcely one instance where I would suggest an alteration. And, though I would not promise,' he laughed good-humouredly, 'but what on a more careful inspection I might be forced to temper praise with blame, I am on the whole inclined to give the book my hearty commendation.'

'But will you buy it?' demanded Miss Brettan.

'No,' said the old gentleman, 'thank you; I never buy books—I have so many. No trouble at all; I am very pleased to have seen it. Permit me!'

He bowed her out with genial ceremony, and was obviously under the impression he had conferred a favour.

The next gentleman she wanted to see was dead, number 3 had gone on a trial-trip, and the fourth was in South Africa. Number 5, on reference to her paper, proved to be a Mr. Crespigny. His outer office much resembled that of Mr. Hatch, and more scions of nobility did arithmetic behind a counter.

She waited while her name was taken in to him; on Mr. Collins's theory, this, the sixth visit, ought to result in half a guinea to her. She had by now arranged a little overture, and was ready to introduce herself in coherent phrases. Instead of her being ushered inside, however, she was appalled to see Mr. Crespigny come out in the wake of his clerk, and it devolved upon her to explain her business publicly. He was a tall

man with a pointed beard, and he advanced towards her in interrogative silence, flicking a cigarette.

'Good-morning,' she said diffidently; 'Messrs. Pattenden, the publishers, have asked me to wait upon you with a specimen of a new work that——'

Mr. Crespigny deliberately turned his back, and walked to the threshold of his sanctum without a word. Regaining it, it was to the hapless clerk he spoke:

'Pshaw!' he exclaimed, 'don't you know a book-agent yet when you see one?'

He slammed the door behind him, and, with a sensation akin to having been slapped in the face, she hurried away, burning with mortification. Her cheeks were hot; no retort occurred to her even when she stood once more on the pavement. She *was* a book-agent, a pest whose intrusion was always liable to be ridiculed or resented according to the bent of the person importuned. Oh, how hateful it was to be poor—'poor' in the fullest meaning of the term; to be compelled to cringe

to cads, and swallow insults, and call it wisdom that one showed no spirit! An hour passed before she could nerve herself to make another attempt; Mr. Crespigny had taken all the pluck out of her, and when she repaired to Pattenden's her report was a chronicle of failures.

The exact answers obtained she had in many cases forgotten, and Mr. Collins advised her in future to jot down brief memoranda of the interviews, that he might be able to point out to her where her line of conduct had been at fault.

'Now, that set speech of yours was a mistake,' he said. 'What you want to do at the start is to get the man's attention, to surprise him into listening. Perhaps he has had half a dozen travellers bothering him already, all trying for an order for something or another, and all beginning the same way. Go in brightly; don't let him know your business till you've got the specimen open under his nose. Cry, "Well, Mr. So-and-So, here it is, out at last!" Say anything that comes into your head, but startle him at the beginning. He may think you're an idiot, but he'll listen from astonishment, and when

you've woke him up you can show him you are not.'

'It's so awful,' she said dejectedly.

'Awful!' exclaimed Mr. Collins. 'Do you know the great Napoleon was a book-agent? Do you know that when he was a lieutenant without a red cent he travelled with a work called "L'Histoire de la Révolution"? My dear madam, if you go to Paris you can see, under a glass case in the Louvre, his canvasser's outfit, and the list of orders he succeeded in collaring, by Jove!'

'I don't suppose he liked it,' she replied.

'He liked the money it brought in; and you will like yours directly, I'll be bound! You don't imagine I expected you to do any good right off, do you? I should have whistled if you'd come in with any different account this afternoon, I can tell you. No, no, Miss Brettan, you mustn't be disheartened because you aren't lucky to commence with; and as to that Victoria Street fellow who was in a bad temper, what of him! He has to make his living, and you have to make yours; remember you're just as much in your rights as the man

you're talking to when you make a call anywhere.'

'Very good,' said Mary; 'if you are satisfied, *I* am. I needn't pretend my services are being clamoured for; and you may be sure I want to succeed with the thing. If by putting my pride in my pocket I can put an income there too, I am ready to do it.'

It became a regular feature of her afternoon visit to the publishers' for Mr. Collins to encourage her with prophecies of good fortune, and her anxiety was frequently assuaged by his consideration. On the first few occasions when she returned with her notes of 'Out, Out, Doesn't need it, Never reads, Too busy to look,' etc., she dreaded the additional chagrin of being rebuked for incompetence, but Mr. Collins was always complaisant, and perpetually assured her she was only enduring disappointments inevitable to a beginner. In his own mind he began to doubt her fitness for the occupation, but he liked her, and knowing that, in the trade phrase, some orders 'booked themselves,' was willing to afford her the chance of making a trifle as long as she

desired to avail herself of it. They were terrible days to Mary Brettan, wearing away, as they did, without result, while her pitiful store of cash grew less and less; and, considering how drearily long each of them was, it was amazing how quickly the week passed. This is an anomaly especially conspicuous to lodgers, and when her bill was due again she beheld her landlady with despair.

'Mrs. Shuttleworth,' she said, 'I have done nothing; I hoped to pay you, and I can't. I'm not a cheat, though it looks very much like it; I am agent for a firm of publishers, and I haven't earned a single commission.' Mrs. Shuttleworth scrutinized her grimly, and Mary held her breath. She might be commanded to leave, and, omnibus fares being now an item of expenditure, three of the four shillings had been spent. 'What do you say?' Mary faltered.

'Well,' rejoined the other, 'it's like this: I'm not 'ard, and I don't say as I'd care to go and turn a respectable girl into the streets, knowing full well what it is I'd be doing. But I'm a working woman, and I can't afford to lay out for a body's

breakfusses and teas with never a farthing coming back for it. Just keep the room a bit, and we'll let the rent stand; but for meals, why I must ask you to get 'em all outside till we're square again.'

A lodger on sufferance, the last article on which money could be raised already pawned, and possessed of a shilling to sustain life until she gained an order for 'The Album of Inventions,' Mary's wretchedness assumed the acutest form imagination can well conceive. To economize on remaining pounds may be managed with refinement; to be frugal of the last silver is possible with decency; but to be reduced to the depths of pence means a devilish hunger whose cravings cannot be stilled for more than an hour at the time, and a weakness that mounts from limbs to brain until the tears are gathered in the throat, and the eyelids ache from exhaustion. However fatigued her fruitless expeditions might have left her, she now made the journey back to the publishing-house on foot, grudging every penny, husbanding the meagre sum with a tenacity born of deadly

fear. The windows of the foreign restaurants with viands temptingly displayed and tastefully garnished, the windows of English ones into which the meats were thrown, enchanted her eye as she would never have believed food could have the power to do. She understood what starvation was, began to understand how people could be brought to thieve by it, and exculpated them for doing so. Without her clothes becoming abruptly shabby, the aspect of the woman deteriorated from her internal consciousness. She carried herself less confidently, she lost the indefinable air that distinguishes the freight from the flotsam on the sea of life. Little things sent the fact home to her. Drivers ceased to lift an inquiring forefinger when she passed a cab-rank, and once, when an address on the list proved to be a private residence, the servant asked her 'who from?' instead of 'what name?'

Inch by inch she continued to fight for the ground that was slipping under her, affecting cheerfulness when the specimen was exhibited, and hiding desperation when she restored it, a failure.

to its case. The sight of Victoria Street and its neighbourhood came to be loathsome to her; often her instructions took her on to different floors of the same building day after day, and, fancying the hall-porters divined the purpose of her repeated appearances, she entered with the expectation of them forbidding her to ascend the stairs. It was no shock to her at last to issue from the lodging absolutely beggared; she had comprehended so long that the situation was approaching that she accepted its advent almost apathetically. She commenced her duties in the customary manner, toiling up flights of steps, and dragging herself down again, just a shade weaker than usual owing to the absence of her ordinary apology for breakfast, and it was not until one o'clock that the hopelessness of attempting to complete the programme was admitted. Then, the prospect of the walk she must accomplish to reach her room again was intimidating enough, and without delaying the solace any longer, even omitting to return to Pattenden's, she went slowly back, and lay down on the bed, managing to forget her hunger inter-

mittently in snatches of sleep. Towards evening the pangs faded altogether, and were succeeded by a physical and mental prostration in which wholly extraneous matters became invested with lachrymal pathos. Incidents of years ago recurred to her without any effort of the will, impelling her to cry feebly at the recollection of some unkind answer she had once given, at a hurt expression she saw again on her father's face. During the night her troubles were reflected in her dreams, and at morning she woke pallid and haggard-eyed.

Proceeding to dress, her hands hung so heavily from the wrists that it was labour to make her toilette; but she did not feel hungry, only dazed. She drank a glassful of water from the bottle on the washstand, and, driven to exertion by necessity, took her way to the publishers', moving between the people torpidly, only partially sensible of her surroundings.

On seeing her, Mr. Collins commented on her appearance, and strongly advised her to go home and rest.

'You don't look well at all,' he observed with

genuine concern. 'Stay indoors to-day; you won't do any good if you're seedy.'

She smiled wistfully at his belief that remaining indoors would be capable of benefiting her.

'If I lose my "seediness" it will be by going out,' she said. 'Give me the list, please, only don't expect me to come in and report; that is more than I shall be equal to.'

He wrote a few names in compliance with her desire.

'But I shan't give you many,' he declared; 'here are half a dozen; try these!'

'Thank you,' said Mary Brettan; 'I will try these.'

She went down and out into the street once more. The rattle of the traffic roared in her ears; the jam and jostle of the pavements confused her. She felt like a child buffeted by giants, and could have thrown up her arms, wailing to God to let the end be now; to allow her to die quickly and quietly, and without much pain.

CHAPTER V.

On the third floor of a house in Delahay Street there used to be an apartment which was at once sitting-room and workshop. A blue plate here and there over the mirror, the shabby armchair on the hearth, and a modest collection of books upon the wall, gave it an air of home. The long white table before the window, littered with plans and paints, and a theodolite in the corner, showed that it served for office too.

A man familiar with that interior had just entered the passage, and as he began to ascend the stairs a smile of anticipated welcome softened the habitual rigidity of his face. He was a tall, loosely-built man, generally credited with five more years than the two-and-thirty he had really seen; a man who, a physiognomist would assert, formed

few friendships and was a stanch friend. Possibly it was the gauntness of the countenance that caused him to appear older than he was, possibly its gravity. He did not look as if he laughed readily, as if he saw much in life to laugh at. He did not look impulsive, or emotional, or a man to be imagined singing a song. He could be pictured the one cool figure in a scene of panic with greater facility than participating in the enthusiasm of a grand-stand. Not that you found his aspect heroic, but that you could not conceive him excited.

He turned the handle as he knocked at the door, and strode into the room without waiting a response. The occupant dropped his T-square with a clatter, giving a quick halloa:

'Philip! great Jupiter! Dear old chap!'

Dr. Kincaid clasped his outstretched hand; there was a grip and a relinquishment. 'Oh yes,' he said, 'it's I; and how are *you?*'

Walter Corri pushed him into the shabby chair, and lounged against the mantelpiece, smiling down upon him.

'How are you?' repeated Dr. Kincaid.

'All right. When did you come up?'

'Yesterday afternoon.'

'Going to stay long?'

'Only a day or two.'

'Pipe?'

'Got a cigar; try one!'

'Thanks.'

They lighted, and Corri pulled out a chair for himself.

'Well, what's the news?' he said.

'Nothing particular; anything fresh with you?'

'No. How's the mother?'

'Tolerably well; she came up with me.'

'Did she! Where are you?'

'Some little hotel. I'm charged with a lot of messages——'

'That you don't remember!'

'I remember one of them: you're to come and see her.'

'Thanks, I shall.'

'Come and dine to-night, if you've nothing on. We have a room to ourselves, and——'

'And we can jaw! What are you going to do during the day?'

'There are two or three things that won't take very long, but I was obliged to come. What are *you* doing?'

'I've an appointment outside for twelve, but I shall be back in about an hour, and then I could stick a paper on the door without risking an independence.'

'You can go about with me?'

'If you'll wait!'

'Good! Where the devil do you keep your matches?'

'Matches "is off." Tear up the *Times*!'

'Corri's economy! Throw me the *Times*, then!'

Kincaid ignited his cigar to his satisfaction, and stretched his long legs before the fire. Both men puffed placidly in silence.

'Well,' said Corri, breaking it, 'and how's the hospital? How do you like it?'

'My mother doesn't like it; she finds it so lonely at home by herself. I expected she'd get used to it in a couple of months—I come round as often as

I can—but she complains as much as she did at the beginning. She's taken up the original idea again, and of course it is dull for her. And she's not strong, either.'

'No, I know, old fellow.'

'Tell her I'm going to be a successful man by-and-by, Wally, and cheer her up. It enlivens her to believe it.'

'I always do.'

'I know you do; whenever she's seen you she looks at me proudly for a week, and tells me what a "charming young man" Mr. Corri is—"how clever!" The only fault she finds with you is that you haven't got married.'

'Is it? Tell her I have what the novelists call an "ideal."'

'You interest me,' said Kincaid; 'when did you catch it?'

'Last year. A fellow I know married the "Baby." She was an adoring daughter, and thought all her family unique.'

'And—?'

'And my ideal is the blessing who is still un-

appropriated at twenty-eight. She will have discovered by that time that her mother is not infallible; that her brothers aren't the first living authorities on wines, the fine arts, horseflesh, and the sciences; and that the "happy home" isn't incapable of improvement. She will, in fact, have grown a little tired of it.'

'You have the wisdom of a relieved widower.'

'I have seen,' said Corri widely. 'The fellow, you know. Married fellows are an awfully "liberal education." This one has been turned into a nurse —among the several penalties of his selection. The "treasure" is for ever dancing on to wet pavements in thin shoes, and sandwiching imbecilities between colds on the chest. He swears you may move the Himalayas sooner than teach a girl of twenty to take care of herself. He told me so with tears in his eyes. I am resolved to be older than my wife, and she has got to be twenty-eight, so it is necessary to wait a few years. I may be able to support her, too, by then; that's another thing in favour of delay.'

'Yes, it looks an advantage. I'll represent the

matter in the proper light for you on the next occasion.'

'Do; it's a most extraordinary fact that every woman advocates matrimony for every man excepting her own son.'

'She makes up for it by her efforts on behalf of her own daughter.'

'Is that from experience?'

'Not in the sense you mean; I'm no "catch" to be chased myself, but I've seen enough to make you sick. The friends see the ceremonies, I see the sequels.'

'"There are worse occupations in this world than feeling a woman's pulse." But Yorick was an amateur! I should say a horrid profession, in one way; it can't leave a scrap of illusion. What's a complexion to a man who knows all that's going on underneath! I suppose when a girl gives a blush you see a sort of map of her muscles, and remember what produces it.'

'I knew a physician who used to declare he'd never cared for any woman who had not had a fatal disease,' replied Kincaid— 'how does that go with

your theory? She was generally consumptive, I believe.'

'Do you understand it?'

'Pity, I dare say, first. Doctors are men!'

'Yes, I suppose they are; only one thinks of them, somehow, as machines. Between the student and the doctor there's such an enormous gap; we know the one is a development of the other, but, then, who recollects the chrysalis when he looks at the butterfly? That's bad, "butterfly" and "machine," great Scott! You know what I mean, though: in both cases the earlier stage is forgotten. It's a stupid idea, but one's apt to feel that a doctor must marry, as he goes to church on Sunday, because the performance is respectable and expected. Some professions don't make any difference to the man himself: you don't think of an engineer as being different from anybody else; but with medicine——'

'It's true,' said Kincaid, 'that hardly anybody but a doctor can realize how a doctor feels; his friends don't know. The only writer who ever drew one was George Eliot.'

'If you're a typical——'

'Oh, I wasn't talking about myself; don't take me. When a man's thoughts mean worries, he acquires the habit of keeping them to himself very soon; that is, if he isn't a fool. It isn't calculated to make him popular, but it prevents him becoming a bore.'

'Out comes your old bugbear, "bore, bore, bore!" Isn't it possible for you to believe a man's friends may listen to his worries without being bored, Kincaid?'

'How many times?'

'Oh damn, whenever they're there!'

'No,' said Kincaid meditatively, 'it isn't. They'd hide the boredom, of course, but he ought to hide the worries. Let a man do his cursing in soliloquies, and grin when it's conversation.'

'Would it be convenient to mention exactly what you do find it possible to believe in?'

'In work and grit and Walter Corri! In doing your honest best in the profession you've chosen for the sake of the profession, not in the hope of what it's going to do for you. You can't quite, that's the devil of it! Your own private ambitions *will* ob-

trude themselves sometimes; but they're only vanity, when all's said and done — just meant for the fuel. What does nine out of ten men's success do for anyone but the nine men? Leaving out the great truths, the discoveries that benefit the human race for all time, what more good does a man effect in his success than he did in his obscurity? Who wants to see him succeed, excepting perhaps his mother—who's dead before he does it? Who's the better for his success? who does he think will be any better for it? Nobody but No. 1! Then, whenever the vanity's sore and rubbed the wrong way, you'd have him go to his friends and "take it out" of them. What a selfish beast!'

'Bosh!' said Corri.

'Oh, I know it isn't argument, but "bosh!"'

'My dear fellow——'

'My dear fellow, you had a rough time of it yourself for any number of years, and——'

'And they've left their mark. Very naturally! What then?'

'Simply that now you want to stunt all humanity in the unfortunate mould that was clapped on you.

You comprehend the right of every pain to shriek excepting mental pain. You'd sit up all night pitying the whimpers of a child with a splintered finger, but if a man made a moan because his heart was broken, you'd call him—what was it?—a "selfish beast"!'

Kincaid ejected a circlet of smoke, and watched it sail away before he answered.

'"Weak,"' he said, 'I think I should call that "weak." It was a very good sentence, though, if not quite accurate. This reminds me of old times; it takes me back ten years to sit in your room and have you bully me. There's something in it, Corri; circumstances are responsible for a deuce of a lot, and we're all of us accidents. I'm a bad case, you tell me; I dare say it's true. You're a good chap to put up with me.'

'Don't be a fool!' said Corri.

The 'fool' stared into the coals, nursing his big knee. He seemed to be considering the accusation of his chum.

'When I was sixteen,' he said, nursing the knee still, and still contemplating the fire, 'I was old.

In looking back, I never see any transition from childhood to maturity. I was a kid, and then I was a man. I was a man when I went to school; I never had larks out of hours; I went there understanding I was sent to learn as much and as quickly as I could. Then from school I was put into an office, and was a man who had to conceal what he felt already: my people knew I wanted to make this my profession, and they couldn't afford it. If I had let the poor old governor see . . . well, he didn't see; I affected contentment, I said a clerkship was "rather jolly." Good Lord! I said it was "jolly"! The abasement of it! The little hypocritical cur it makes of you, that life, when a gape is regarded as a sign of laziness, and you're forced to hide the natural thing behind an account-book or the lid of your desk; when the knowledge that you mustn't lay down your pen for five minutes under your chief's eyes teaches you to sneak your leisure when he turns his back, and to simulate uninterrupted industry at the sound of his return. With the humbug, and the "Yes, sirs" and the "No, sirs," you're a schoolboy over again

as a clerk, excepting that in an office they pay you, and at school you pay them !'

'My clerk has yet to come !' said Corri, grimacing.

'Yes, he's being demoralized somewhere else! How I thanked God one night when my father told me if I hadn't out-grown my desire he could manage to gratify it—*how* I thanked Him ! The words positively took me out of hell. But when I did become a student I couldn't help having the consciousness that to study was an extravagance. It was with me all the time, reminding me of my responsibility, although it wasn't until the governor died that I knew how great an extravagance it must have appeared to him ; and I never " spreed " with the fellows as a student any more than I had enjoyed myself with the lads in the playground. Altogether, I can scarcely be said to have "rollicked," Corri. By heaven ! such youth as I have had has been snatched at between troubles.'

'Poor old beggar !'

Kincaid smiled quickly.

'There's more feeling in "you poor old beggar!"' he said, 'than in a letter piled up with condolence.

It's hard lines one can't write "poor old beggar" to every acquaintance who has a bereavement!'

The momentary passion that had crept into his strong voice while speaking of his earlier life to the one person in the world to whom he could have brought himself to speak so had been instantly repressed, and his tone was again the impassive one that was second-nature to him.

'Believe me,' he said, harking back after a pause, 'that idea of the medical profession, that "respectable and expected" idea of yours, is quite wrong. Oh, it isn't yours alone, it's common enough: every little comic paragraphist thinks himself justified in turning out a certain number of ignorant jokes at the profession's expense in the course of the year; every twopenny-halfpenny caricaturist has to thank us for a certain number of his dinners. No harm's intended, and nobody minds; but people who actually know something of the subject that these "funny men" are so constant to can tell you there's more nobility and self-sacrifice in the medical profession than in any under the sun, not excepting the Church. Yes,

and more hardships too! The chat on the weather, and the fee for remarking it's a fine day, has little parallel in fact; the difficulty is to get the fees in return for loyal attendance. Nobody is reverenced like the family doctor in time of sickness. In the days of their child's recovery the parents love the doctor almost as fervently as they do the child; but the fervour's got cold when Christmas comes, and the gratitude's forgotten. And they know a doctor can't dun them, so he has to wait for his account, and pretend the money's of no consequence when he bows to them, though the butcher and the baker and the grocer don't pretend to him, but look for his own indebtedness to be settled every week. I could give you instances——'

He gave instances. Corri spoke of difficulties, too. They smoked their cigars to the stumps in discussion, branching from one theme to another, talking leisurely until Corri declared that he must go.

'In an hour, then, I'll call back for you,' said Kincaid; 'you won't be longer?'

'I don't think so. But why not wait? You can

make yourself comfortable; there's plenty of the *Times* left to read.'

'I will. I shan't read, though; I want to write a couple of letters—can I?'

'There's a desk, and a chair in front of it. Have I got everything?—let me see. Yes, that's all. Well, I'll hurry up, but if I should be detained I shall find you here all right?'

'You will find me here,' said Kincaid, 'don't be alarmed.'

The other's retirement did not send him to his correspondence immediately, however. Left alone, it was manifest how used the man had been to living alone. It was manifest in his composure, in his deliberation, in the earnestness he devoted to the task when he at length attacked it. He had just reached the foot of the second page when somebody knocked at the door.

'Come in,' he said abstractedly.

The knock was repeated. It occurred to him that Corri had omitted to provide for this contingency of patients, or clients, or whatever he called his people, coming to bother during his

absence, and that he would not know what to say to them. 'Come in!' he cried more loudly, and not without a sense of annoyance at the interruption.

He glanced over his shoulder, and saw the intruder was a woman carrying something. What did she want?

'Mr. Corri?'

'Mr. Corri's not in,' he replied, fingering the pen; 'he'll be back by-and-by.'

Mary lingered irresolutely. Her temples throbbed, and in her weakness the sight of a chair magnetized her.

'Shall I wait?' she murmured; 'perhaps he won't be very long?'

'Eh?' said Kincaid. 'Oh, wait if you like, madam.'

She sank into a seat mutely. The response had not sounded encouraging, but it permitted her to rest, and rest was what she yearned for now. How indifferent the world was! how mercilessly little anybody cared for anybody else! 'Wait, if you like, madam'—go and die, if you like, madam—go

and lay your bones in the gutter, madam, if you like, and so long as you don't trouble me! She watched the big hand hazily as it shifted to and fro across the paper. The man probably had money in his pocket that signified nothing to him, and to her it might have been salvation. He lived in comfort while she was starving; he did not know that she was starving, but how much would it affect him if he did know? She wondered if she could tempt him to give an order for the book: he was just as likely to be a purchaser as the other one, perhaps; if so, she would take a cab back to Mr. Collins and ask him for her commission at once, and go and get something to eat—should she be able to eat any longer.

She roused herself with an effort, and crossed the room to where he sat:

'I came to see Mr. Corri from Messrs. Pattenden,' she faltered, 'about a new work they're publishing. I have brought a specimen—if I am not disturbing you——'

She put it down as she spoke, and stood a pace or two behind him, watching the effect.

'Is this woman very nervous?' said Kincaid to himself. 'So she's a book-agent, is she? I thought she had something to sell. Good Lord, what a life!'

'Thanks,' he answered. 'I'm very busy just now, and I never buy my books on the subscription plan.'

'You could have it sent in to you when it's complete,' she suggested.

He drummed his fingers on the title-page. 'I don't want it.'

'Perhaps Mr. Corri?'

'I really can't speak for Mr. Corri, but don't wait for him, on my advice; I'm afraid it would be patience wasted.'

He shut the 'Album' up, intimating he had done with it; but the woman made no movement to withdraw it, and he invited this movement by pushing the thing aside. He drew forward the blotting-pad preparatory to resuming his letter; and then she did not offer to remove her obnoxious 'specimen' from the desk. He was beginning to feel irritated.

'If you choose to wait, madam, take a seat,' he said. 'I say take——'

He turned, questioning her continued silence, and sprang to his feet in dismay. The book-agent's head was lolling on her bosom, and his arm—extended to support her—was only out in time to catch her as she fell.

CHAPTER VI.

'Now,' said Kincaid, when she opened her eyes at length, 'what's the matter with you? No nonsense; I'm a doctor; you mustn't tell lies to me! What's the matter with you?'

There are some things a woman cannot say; this was one of them.

'You are very exhausted?'

'Oh,' she said weakly, 'I—just a little.'

'When had you food last?'

She gave no answer. He scrutinized her persistently, noting her hesitation, and shot his next question straight at the mark.

'Are you hungry?'

The eyes closed again, and her lips quivered.

'Boor!' he exclaimed to himself, 'she's starving,

and you wouldn't buy her book! Beast! she's starving, and you tried to turn her out!'

But his sympathy was hardly communicated by his voice; indeed, in her shame she thought him rather rough.

'You stop here a minute,' he continued; 'don't you go and faint again, because I forbid it. I'm going to order a prescription for you. Your complaint isn't incurable; I've had it myself!'

He left her in quest of the housekeeper, a flustered little body whom he unearthed in the basement, and whom he interrogated on the subject of eggs and coffee.

'Have you got anybody you can send out for some?' he demanded. 'Hot coffee, mind you—no slops. There's a place close by; is there anybody here who can run?'

She admitted feebly to the existence of a 'gal.'

'Will that girl run if I make her a present of a shilling?'

The flustered one opined that, stimulated by a shilling, the triumphs of Achilles himself would fall short of the achievements of the 'gal.'

'Very well,' he said. 'Here you are; now pack her off. Mr. Corri's room; hurry!'

He went back and found his patient sitting in the armchair. He observed there were tear-stains on her cheek, though she turned away her face at his approach.

'The prescription's being made up,' he said. 'Would you like the window shut again? No? All right, we'll keep it open. Don't talk if you'd rather not; there isn't the slightest occasion; I know everything you could say just as well as you do!'

He ignored her ostentatiously until the tray appeared, and then, receiving it at the doorway, brought it across to her himself.

'Come,' he said, 'try that—slowly.'

'Oh!' she murmured, shrinking.

'Don't be silly; do as I tell you. There's nothing to be bashful about. I know you're not an angel; your having an appetite doesn't astonish me a bit.'

'How good you are!' she muttered; 'what must you think of me?'

'Eat,' commanded Kincaid; 'ask me what I think of you afterwards.'

She was evidently in no danger of committing the mistake he had looked for—his difficulty was not to restrain her, but to persuade; nor was her reluctance the outcome of embarrassment alone.

'It has gone,' she said, shaking her head; 'I am really not hungry now.'

He encouraged her till the plunge had been taken, and then retired behind the newspaper to distress her as little as might be by his presence. At the expiration of a quarter of an hour he put the *Times* down. The eggshells were empty, and he stretched himself and addressed her:

'Better?'

'Much better,' she said, with a ghost of a smile.

'Have you been having a long experience of this sort of thing?'

'N—no,' she returned nervously, 'not very.'

He caressed his moustache; she was ceasing to be a patient and becoming a woman, and he did not quite know what he was to do with her. Some-

how, despite her situation, the offer of a sovereign looked as if it would be coarse. Mary divined his dilemma, and made as if to rise.

'Sit down,' he said authoritatively; 'when you're well enough to go I'll tell you; till I do, stay where you are.'

She felt that she ought to say something, proffer some explanation, but was at a loss how to begin. There was a pause, and then:

'Is there any likelihood of this business of yours improving?' inquired Kincaid. 'Supposing you were able to hold out, would there be anything to look forward to?'

'No,' she said; 'I don't believe there would be anything whatever to look forward to. I'm afraid I am not adapted to it.'

'Was it an attractive career, that you made the attempt?'

'Not in the least attractive, but it seemed a chance.'

'And the chances are not many; I see.'

He saw also she was a gentlewoman fitted for more refined pursuits. How had she reached this

pass? he wondered. Would she volunteer the information, or should he ask her? He failed to perceive what assistance he could render if he knew; and yet if he did not help her she would go away and die, and he would know she was going away to die as he let her out.

'I was introduced to the firm by a very old connection of theirs. I was at my wits' end to find something to do, and he fancied that as I was—well, that as I was a lady—it sounds rather odd under the circumstances to speak of being a lady, doesn't it!—'

'I don't see anything odd about it,' he said. 'Go on!'

'He fancied I might do rather well at it. But I think it's a drawback to me, on the contrary. Being unaccustomed to the kind of work, it's not easy to decline to take "No" for an answer, and nobody can do any good in a vocation she is ashamed of.'

'But you shouldn't be ashamed,' he responded; 'it's honest trade.'

'That's what the manager tells me. Only when

a woman has to go into a stranger's office and bother him, and be snubbed for her pains, the honesty of it doesn't prevent her feeling uncomfortable. You must have thought me a nuisance yourself.'

'I fear I was rather brusque,' he said quickly. 'I was busy; I hope I wasn't rude!'

Her colour rose.

'I didn't mean that at all,' she stammered; 'I shouldn't be very grateful to remind you of it if you had been.'

'I should have imagined a book of that sort would have been tolerably easy to sell, now; it's an uncommonly useful work of reference. What is the price?'

'Two pounds ten altogether. It isn't dear, but the people won't buy it, all the same.'

'Yes, it's got up well,' he said, taking it from the desk and turning over the leaves; 'how many volumes did you say?'

'Four.'

She made a little tentative movement towards the specimen to recover it, but he went on with

his examination as if the gesture had escaped him.

'If it's not too late in the day I'll change my mind and subscribe for a copy,' he declared. 'Put my name down, please, will you?'

She clasped her hands tightly in her lap.

'No,' she said, 'thank you, I would rather not.'

'Not?'

'No,' she faltered; 'you don't want the book, I know you don't. You have fed me and done enough for me already; I won't take your money, too; I can't!'

Her bosom began to swell tempestuously. He saw by the widened eyes she fixed upon the fire that she was struggling to repress a recurrence of crying.

'There,' he said gently, 'don't break down; let's talk about something else.'

'Oh!'—she sneaked a tear away—'I am not used —don't think——'

'No, no,' he said, '*I* know, I understand! Poke that for me, will you? let's have a blaze.'

She took the poker up, and prolonged the task a minute while she hung her head.

Remarked Kincaid:

'It's awful to be hard up, isn't it? nobody can appreciate it but by experience. I've been through all the stages; it's abominable!'

'*You* have?' she said.

'Oh yes, I know all about it. So I don't tell you that "money's the least thing." Only the people who have always had enough say that.'

'One wants so little in the world to relieve anxiety,' said Mary; 'it does seem cruel that so few can get sufficient to know ease.'

'What do you call "ease"?'

'"Ease?" I should call employment "ease" now.'

'How did you interpret the term once, then?'

'I used to be more exacting once—more foolish, perhaps I ought to say. "Experience teaches fools."'

'Pardon me,' said Kincaid, 'experience teaches intelligent people; the fools go on blundering to the end. "Once——?"—I interrupted you.'

'Well, it used to mean a home of my own, and relations to care for me, and money enough to settle the bills without minding if the total came to five shillings more than had been foreseen. It's a beautiful regulation that the less we have the less we want, only sometimes the supply dwindles to the proportions of the horse's one straw, and that's too fine a point to cut our requirements down to.'

'How did you come to this thing?' asked Kincaid suddenly; 'couldn't you get different work before the last straw?'

'If you knew how I tried!' she said. 'I haven't any friends here; that was my difficulty. A friendless woman — who will hear her! I wanted a situation as companion, but I had to give the idea up at last, and it ended by my going to Pattenden's. Don't think they know—I mean, don't imagine they guess the straits I'm in: that would be unfair. They have been very kind to me.'

'You have never been a "companion," I suppose?'

'No; but I hoped to get such a post, for all that.

Everything has to be done for the first time at some period. All the adepts were novices once.'

'That's true enough, but there are so many adepts in everything to-day that there is no chance for the novices to be trusted.'

'Then how are they to qualify?'

'That's the novices' affair. You can't expect people to pay incompetence when skilled labour is loafing at the street corners.'

'I expect nothing,' she answered dejectedly; 'my expectations are all dead and buried. We are only furnished with a certain capacity for expectation, I think; under favourable conditions it wears well, and we say, "While there's life there's hope;" but if it's taxed too severely it gives out before the life, and we accept occurrences without anticipating at all.'

'And you drift without a fight in you?'

'A woman can't do more than fight until she is beaten.'

'She shouldn't acknowledge to being beaten.'

'Theory,' she said between her teeth; 'the breakfast-tray is fact.'

'What do you reckon is going to become of you?'

'"Without anticipating at all,"' she repeated doggedly.

'Oh, that's all rubbish! Give me a straight reply; what *do* you?'

'I shall starve, then,' she said, 'and be laid by the side of my expectations.'

'Sss! You know it?'

'I know it, and I am resigned to it. If I were not resigned to it it would be much harder. There is nothing that can happen to provide for me; there isn't a soul in the world I can—"will," to be accurate—appeal to for help. You have delayed it a little by your kindness, but you can't prevent it coming. Oh, I have hoped and struggled till I am worn out!' she went on, her voice shaking. 'If there were a prospect, I could rouse myself, weak as I am, to gain it; but there isn't a prospect, not the glimmer of a prospect! I'm not cowardly; I am only rational. I admit what is; I have finished duping myself.'

She could express her despair, this woman; she

had education and manner. He contemplated her attentively; she interested him very strongly.

'You speak like a fatalist, nevertheless,' he said to her.

'I speak like a woman who has reached the lowest rung of destitution, and been fed on charity. I—oh, don't, *don't* keep forcing me to make a child of myself like this; let me go! Perhaps you are quite right—things will improve!'

'You shall go presently; not yet—not till I say you may!'

There was silence between them once more. He lay back, with his hands thrust deep into his trouser-pockets and his feet crossed, pondering.

'You weren't brought up to anything, of course,' he said abruptly, 'never been trained to anything? You can't do anything or make anything that has any market value?'

'I lived at home.'

'And now you're helpless! What rot it is! why didn't your father teach you to use your hands?'

'I think you said you were a doctor?' she returned, lifting her head.

'Eh? Yes, my name is Dr. Kincaid.'

'My father's was Dr. Anthony Brettan; he never expected his daughter would be in such extremity.'

'You don't say so!' he exclaimed. 'Was your father one of us? I'm glad to make your acquaintance. Is it "Miss Brettan"?'

She bowed affirmatively, warming with an impulse to go further, and cry, 'Also I have been a sick-nurse: you are a doctor, can't you get me something to do?' But if she did he would require corroboration, and, in the absence of her certificate, institute inquiries at the hospital, and then the whisper would circulate that 'Brettan was no longer living with her husband' — they would speedily ascertain he had not died—and from that point to the truth would be the veriest step. 'Never married at all — the disgrace! Of course, an actor, but fancy *her*!' She could see their faces, the astonishment of their contempt. Narrow circle as it was, it had been her world, and she could not do it.

'But surely, Miss Brettan,' he said, 'there must be someone who can serve you a little—someone

among the friends of your father who can put you in the way of an occupation?'

Immediately she regretted having proclaimed as much as she had.

'My father lived very quietly, and socially he was hardly what is called a popular man. For several reasons I would not have his daughter's distress suspected by the people who knew him.'

'Those people are your credentials, though,' he urged; 'it seems you can't afford to turn your back on them. If you will be guided by advice, you will swallow your pride.'

'I couldn't; I made the resolve to stand alone, and I shall not swerve from it. Besides, you are wholly wrong in supposing any one of them would exert himself for me to any extent if I did. My father did not have—was not intimate enough with anybody for my plight to excite anything more useful than gossip.'

A difficult woman to aid, thought Kincaid pityingly. A notion had flashed across his brain at her allusion to the kind of employment she had

desired, which the announcement of her parentage was strengthening. But there must be something to go upon, something more than mere assertion.

'If a post turned up, whom do you leave yourself to refer to?'

'Messrs. Pattenden; I believe they would speak for me willingly.'

'Anybody else?'

'Only the firm; but the manager would see anybody who went to him about me, I am almost sure.'

'You need friends, you know,' he said; 'you are very awkwardly placed without any.'

'Oh, I do know,' she rejoined, 'to have no friends is a crime; one is totally helpless without them, and a woman's helplessness is the best of reasons why no help should be extended to her. But it sounds a merciless argument, doctor, horribly merciless, at the beginning!'

'It's a merciless life!' he retorted. 'Look here, Miss Brettan, I don't want to beat about the bush: you're in a beastly hole, and if I can pull you out of it I shall be glad—for your own sake, and for the sake of your dead father. It's like this, though:

the only thing I can see my way to involves the comfort of someone else. You were talking about a place as "companion"; I can't live at home now, and my mother wants one.'

'Doctor!'

She caught her breath.

'If I were to take the responsibility of recommending you, it's probable she'd engage you. I think you'd suit her, but—well, it's rather a large order!'

'Oh, you should never be sorry!' she cried. 'You shall never be sorry for trusting me, if you will!'

'You see, it's not very easy. It's a somewhat irregular proceeding to go engaging a lady one meets for the first time.'

'Why, you would not meet anybody else oftener,' she pleaded eagerly; 'if you advertised, you would take the woman after the one interview. You wouldn't exchange a lot of visits and get friendly before you engaged her.'

He pulled at his moustache again.

'But of course she would not — would not

be starving,' she added; 'she would not have fainted in your room. It would be no more judicious, but it would be so much more conventional.'

'You argue neatly,' he said with a smile.

The smile encouraged her. She smiled response. He could not smile if he were going to refuse her, she felt.

'Dr. Kincaid——' she said.

'One minute,' he interposed; 'I hear someone coming, I think; excuse me!'

It was Corri; he met him as he turned the handle, and drew him outside.

'There's a woman in there,' he said, 'and a breakfast-tray, and confusion generally. Come down on to the next landing; I want to speak to you.'

'What on earth——' said Corri. 'Are you giving a party? What do you mean by a woman and a breakfast-tray? Did the woman bring the breakfast-tray?'

'No, she brought a book. Don't laugh; it's serious.'

They leant over the banisters conferring, while Mary, in the armchair, remained trembling with suspense. The vista opened by Kincaid's words had shown her how tenaciously she still clung to life, how passionately she would clutch at a chance of prolonging it. Awhile ago her one prayer had been to die speedily; now, with a possibility of rescue dangled before her eyes, her prayer was only for the possibility to be fulfilled. Would he be satisfied, or would he send her away? Her fate hung on his decision. She did not marvel at her tenacity; it seemed to her so natural she did not question it at all. Yet it is of all things the oddest—the love of living which the most life-worn preserve in their hearts. Every day they long for sleep, and daily the thought of death alarms them—terrifies their inconsistent souls, though few indeed believe there is a hell, and everybody who is good enough to believe in heaven believes also that he is good enough to go to it.

'O God,' she whispered, 'let him take me! Forgive me what I did, and make me a good woman! Don't let me suffer any more, God!

You know how I loved him when I sinned—how I loved him!—how I lo-ve-d——'

'Well,' demanded Corri on the landing, 'and what are you going to do?'

'I'm thinking,' Kincaid answered, 'of letting my mother go to see her.'

'It's wildly philanthropic, isn't it?'

'It looks wild, of course.' He mused a moment. 'But, after all, one knows where she comes from: her father was a professional man; she herself is palpably a lady.'

'What was her father's name, again?'

'Brettan—Anthony.'

'Ever heard it before?'

'One can discover it in five minutes if there wasn't such a person! Besides, my mother would have to decide for herself. I should recount the whole affair, and if an interview left her content, why——'

'*Enfin!*' said Corri. 'Go and pronounce the ukase! You'll find me on the bed. By the way, if, without offending the damsel, you could hand my pipe out, I should take it as a favour!'

'I can't; you've smoked enough, too. Wait! here's a last cigar; go and console yourself with that!'

Kincaid returned to the room, but as yet he was not certain he meant to pronounce the ukase. Mary looked up anxiously, scanning his countenance, and striving to divine by its expression the result of the consultation on the stairs. The person consulted was Mr. Corri, she concluded, the man she had been sent to importune. Old or young? easy-going or morose? On which side had he cast the weight of his opinion—this man she had never seen?

'We were talking about the companion's place, Miss Brettan,' began Kincaid. 'Now, what do you say?'

Instantly she glowed with gratitude to the unknown personage, who, in reality, had done nothing.

'Never,' she insisted, 'never should you regret it, Dr. Kincaid, I promise you!'

'Understand, I couldn't guarantee the engagement in any case,' he said hastily. 'The most I

could do would be to mention the matter; the rest would depend on my mother's own feelings.'

'I should be just as thankful to you if she objected. Don't think I under-estimate my drawbacks—I know that for you even to consider engaging me is generous. But—— Oh, I would do my best!—I would indeed! The difficulty is as clear to me as to you,' she went on rapidly. 'I see it every bit as plainly. See it! I've seen it again and again. It has barred me from employment time after time! I am a stranger, I cannot furnish credentials; I can only look you in the face and say: "I have told you the truth; if I were able to follow your advice and pocket my pride, I could prove that I have told you the truth"; and what is that?—anybody might say it and be lying! Oh yes, I know!—I know! Doctor, my lack of proper references has made me suspected till I could have cried blood. Doors have closed on me, not because I was ineligible in myself, but because I was a lady who had not had employers to declare, "I found her a satisfactory person." Posts which might have been given to

me with alacrity have been offered to other women because they had papers to substantiate their accounts of themselves, and I had not. At the beginning I imagined my tones would carry conviction with them. I thought I could say: "Honestly, conscientiously, this tale is true," and someone—one in a dozen, perhaps one in a score—would be found to credit it. What a mistake it was I soon discovered! The absurdity of hoping to be believed! Why, in all London, in the length and breadth of the earth, there is no creature so forsaken as the gentleman's daughter without friends. The servant, the drudge, may be taken on trust; the woman who is educated—never!'

'She may sometimes,' said Kincaid. 'Hang it! it isn't so bad as all that. What *I* can do for you I will. Very likely my mother will call on you this afternoon. Whereabouts are you staying?'

A hansom had just discharged a fare at one of the opposite houses, and he hailed it from the window.

'The best thing you can do now is to go home and rest, and try not to worry. Cheer up, and

hope for the best, Miss Brettan—care killed a cat!'

She swallowed convulsively.

'That is the address,' she said. 'God bless you, Dr. Kincaid!'

He led the way down to the passage, and put her into the cab. It was, perhaps, superfluous to show her that he remembered cabs were beyond her means, yet she might be harassed during the drive by a dread of the man's demand, and he paid him so that she should see.

The occurrence had swelled his catalogue of calls. He told Corri they had better drop in at Guy's, and glance at a medical directory; but in passing a second-hand bookstall they noticed an old copy exposed for sale, and examined that. He encountered Anthony Brettan's name in the provincial section with a certain gladness, for it would have hurt him to find this woman had deceived him, and, moreover, remarked that Brettan had been a student of his own college.

'"Brettan" is going up!' he observed cheerfully. 'Now step it, my son!'

Mary's arrival at the lodging was an event of local interest. Mrs. Shuttleworth stood at the door conversing with a neighbour, and watched her descend agape. Two children playing on the pavement suspended their operations in dumb amaze. She told Mrs. Shuttleworth a lady might ask for her during the day, and, mounting to the garret, shut herself in to wrestle unsuccessfully with her fears of being refused or forgotten altogether. Would this mother come or not? If not—she shivered; she had been so near to ignominious death the smell of it had reached her nostrils—if not, the devilish gnawing would be back again directly, and the faint sick craving would follow it; and then there would be a fading of consciousness for the last time, and they would talk about her as 'it,' and be afraid. Faugh!

But the mother did come. It seemed so wonderful that, even when she sat beside her in the attic, and everything was progressing favourably, Mary could scarcely realize that it was true. She came, and the engagement was concluded. There are some women who are essentially women's women;

Mary was one of them. Mrs. Kincaid, who came already interested, sure her Philip could make no mistake, and wishful to be satisfied, was charmed with her. The pleading tones, the repose of manner, the—for so she described it later—'Madonna face,' if they did not go 'straight to her heart,' mightily pleased her fancy. And of course Mary liked her—what more natural! She was gentle of voice, she had the softest blue eyes that ever beamed mildly under white hair, and—culminating attraction—she obviously liked Mary.

'I'm a lonely old woman,' she said, 'now my son's been appointed medical officer at the hospital. It'll be very quiet for you, but you'll bear that, won't you? I do think you'll be comfortable with me, and I'm certain I shall want to keep you.'

'Quiet for me!' said Mary. 'Oh, Mrs. Kincaid, you speak as if you were asking a favour of me, but your son must have told you that—what—I suppose he saved my life.'

'That's his profession,' answered the old lady brightly; 'that's what he had to learn to do.'

'Ah, but not with hot breakfasts!' Mary smiled.

'I accept your offer gratefully; I will come as soon as you like.'

'Can you manage to go back with us the day after to-morrow? Don't if it inconveniences you; but if you can be ready——'

'I can; I shall be quite ready.'

'Good girl!' said Mrs. Kincaid. 'Now you must let me advance you a small sum, or—I dare say you have things to get—perhaps we had better make it this. Tush! it's your own money, not a present; there's nothing to thank me for. Good-afternoon, Miss Brettan; I will write letting you know the train.'

'This' was a five-pound note. When she was alone again Mary picked it up, and smoothed it out, and quivered at the crackle. These heavenly people! their tenderness, their consideration! Oh, how beautiful it would be if they knew all about her, and there were no reservation! She did wish she could have revealed all—they had been so nice and kind!

She sought out the landlady and paid her debt—the delight she felt in paying her debt!—intimating

she would be giving up her room after the next night. She went forth to a little foreign restaurant in the Gray's Inn Road, where she dined wholesomely and well, treating herself to cutlets, bread-crumbed and brown, and bordered with tomatoes, to pudding and gruyère, and a cup of black coffee, all for eighteenpence, after feeing the waiter. She returned to the attic—glorified attic! it would never appal her any more—and abandoned herself to meditating upon the 'things.' There was this, and there was that, and there was the other. Yes, and she must have a box. She would have had her initials painted on the box, only the paint would look so curiously new. Should she have her initials on it? No, she decided that she would not. Then there were her watch and bag to be redeemed at the pawnbroker's, and she must bid good-bye to Mr. Collins. What a busy day would be the morrow! what a dawn of new hope, new peace, new life! Her anxieties were left behind; before her lay shelter and rest. Yet on a sudden the pleasure faded from her features, and her lips twitched painfully.

'Tony!' she murmured.

She stood still where she had risen. A sob, a second sob, a torrent of tears! She was on her knees beside the bed, gasping, shuddering, crying out on God and him:

'O Tony, Tony, Tony!'

CHAPTER VII.

The sun shone brightly when she met Mrs. Kincaid at Euston. The doctor was there, loose-limbed and bony, lounging by his mother's side. He shook Mary's hand, and remarked it was a nice day for travelling. She had been intending to eject some phrase of gratitude on greeting him, but his manner did not invite it, so she attempted to throw her thanks into a look instead. She suffered at first from slight embarrassment, not knowing if she should take her own ticket, nor what assistance was expected of a 'companion' at a railway-station. Perhaps she ought to select the compartment, and superintend the labelling of the luggage. Fortunately the luggage was not heavy, her own being by far the larger portion, and the tickets, she learnt directly, Dr. Kincaid had already procured.

Her employer lived in Westport, a town Mary had never visited, and a little conversation sprang into life from her questions concerning it. She did not say much—she spoke very diffidently, in fact, the consciousness that she was being paid to talk and be entertaining weighting her tongue. She was relieved when, shortly after they started, Mrs. Kincaid imitated her son's example, who lay back in his corner with his face hidden behind the *Lancet*, leaving her free to look out of the window and think.

They travelled second class, and it was not until a stoppage occurred at some junction that their privacy was invaded. Then a large woman, oppressed by packages and baskets, entered, and, as the new-comer belonged to the category of persons who regard a railway journey as a heaven-sent opportunity to eat an extra meal, her feats with sandwiches had a fascination that rivalled the interest of the landscape.

Of course, three hours later, when the train reached Westport, Mary felt elated. Of course she gazed eagerly from the platform over the prospect.

It was new and pleasant and refreshing. There was a little winding road with white palings, and a cottage with a red roof. A bell tolled softly across the meadows, and somebody standing near her said he supposed 'that was for five o'clock service.' To have exchanged the jostle of London for a place where people had time to remember service on a week-day, to be able to catch the chirp of the birds between the roll of the wheels, was immediately exhilarating. Then, too, as they drove to the house she scented the freshness of tar in the air that bespoke proximity to the sea. Her bosom lifted: 'The blessed peace of it all!' she thought; 'how happy I ought to be!'

But she was not happy. That first evening there came to her the soreness and sickness of recollection. Mrs. Kincaid and she were left alone, the doctor betaking himself to the hospital, and in the twilight they sat in the pretty little parlour, chatting fitfully. The soreness was engendered by the contrast of the present arrival to those she was used to. No unpacking of photographs here, she mused idly; no landlady loquacious on the doings

of last week's company; no stroll after tea with Tony just to see where the theatre was. How odd! She said 'how odd!' but presently she meant 'how painful!' And then it came upon her like a shock to reflect that the old life, to her long dead and buried, was going on still without her. The photographs were still being unpacked, and set forth on mantelpieces; landladies still waxed garrulous on last week's business; Tony was still strolling about the towns on Sunday evenings, just as he had done when she was with him. And he was going to be Miss Westland's husband, while *she* was here! How hideous, how frightful and unreal, it seemed!

She got up, and roamed over to the flower-stand between the curtains on the pretext of examining the plants.

'Are you tired, Miss Brettan?' inquired Mrs. Kincaid; 'perhaps you would like to go to your room early to-night?'

'No,' she said, 'thank you; I am afraid I feel a trifle strange as yet, that is all.'

At the corner of the turning opposite was a

hoarding, and a comic-opera poster shone out among the local shopkeepers' advertisements. The sudden sight of theatrical printing was like a welcome to her; she stood looking at it, thrilling at it, with the past alive and warm again in her heart.

'You will soon feel yourself at home,' Mrs. Kincaid said after a pause; 'I'm sure I can understand that you find it rather uncomfortable at first.'

'Oh, not uncomfortable,' Mary explained quickly; 'it is queer a little, just that. I mean, I do not know what I ought to do, and I'm afraid of seeming inattentive through ignorance. What *is* a companion's work, Mrs. Kincaid?'

'Well, I've never had one,' the old lady said with a laugh, 'so I'm just as ignorant as you are. I think you and I will get on best, do you know, if we forget you have come as "companion"—if you talk when you like, and keep quiet when you like. You see, it is literally a companion I want, not somebody to ring the bell for me, and order the dinner, and make herself useful; this isn't a big

house, and I'm not a fashionable person: I want a woman who'll keep me from moping, and who'll be nice.'

Her answer described her requirements fairly well, and Mary found that little indeed was expected of her in return for the salary, so little that she wondered sometimes if she earned it, small as it was. Excepting that she was continually conscious she must never be out of temper, and that she was frequently obliged to read aloud when she would sooner have sat in reverie, she was practically her own mistress. Even, as the days went by, she found herself giving utterance to a thought as it came to her, without pausing to conjecture its reception; speaking with the spontaneity which, with the paid companion, is always the last thing to be acquired.

Few pleasures are shorter-lived than the one of being restored to enough to eat, the reminiscence of hunger being no appetiser; and in a week her sense of novelty had almost entirely worn away. The routine grew familiar. They walked together; sometimes to the beach, but more often

in the town, for the approach to the sea tired Mrs. Kincaid. Westport, though on the coast, is not esteemed a watering-place by the people who regard as essential adjuncts to their sea a pier, parade, and plethora of brass bands; and in the summer Mary discovered the population of fifty thousand was not very greatly augmented. From Laburnum Lodge it took nearly twenty minutes to gain the shore, the way lying through several roads of private houses, the last of which was a hill and fatigued the elder woman especially. At the top of the incline the better-class houses came to an abrupt termination, and only a few cottages were somewhat forlornly scattered to right and left, before them an expanse of rather ragged grass, endowed with a bench or two, sloping to the shingles on which the waves broke. Despite its bareness, almost because of it, indeed, Mary thought the spot delightful; the quietude appealed to her, and there is an adaptability about the ocean which makes it congenial to every mood, so that one can joy or mourn more intensely by the sea than anywhere else. She often wished she

could go alone and give herself up to undisturbed reflection in that murmurous calm.

They saw but little of the doctor. Now and again he came round for an hour or so, and at first Mary absented herself on these occasions, going up to her room, that his mother and he might be free for confidences. But Mrs. Kincaid commented on her retirement, saying it was unnecessary, and thenceforward she remained, joining in the conversation.

She did not chance to be out alone until she had been installed here nearly three months; and the afternoon when Mrs. Kincaid inquired if she would mind selecting a novel for her at the circulating library, since they could not think of a list to despatch by a servant, the request was music to her. A desire to see the *Era*, and ascertain Carew's whereabouts, had been steadily growing within her, until of late the longing had risen almost to the intensity of a fever.

She crossed the interlying churchyard, and made her way along the High Street impatiently; and, reaching the railway bookstall, procured a copy of

the latest issue. It was with difficulty she curbed an inclination to open it on the platform; but wishing to make the examination in solitude, she restrained herself until she had turned down the little lane at the station's side, and gained the gate where the coal-trucks came to an end and a patch of green began. She doubted whether the company would be touring so long, but the paper would tell her something of his doings under any circumstances. She rested it on the top bar and ran her eye eagerly down the titles under the heading of 'On the Road.' No, as she had supposed, the 'Foibles' was not 'out' now; the name did not occur. Had the tour broken up for good, she wondered, or was there merely a vacation? She would soon learn by Tony's 'professional card.' How well she knew the sheet! The sheet! she knew the column, its very number in the column—knew it followed 'Farrell' and came before 'De Vigne.' She even recalled the week when he had abandoned the cheaper advertisements in alphabetical order. He had been cast for a part in a production; she remembered she had said, 'Now you're going to

create,' and, laughing, he had answered, 'Oh, I must have half a crown's worth "to create!"' He had been lying on the sofa—how it all came back to her! What was he doing now? She found the place in an instant:

'MR. SEATON CAREW,
RESTING,
Assumes direction of Miss Olive Westland's Tour, Aug. 4th.
See "Companies" page.'

They were married! The phrasing of the thing attested it. He had married Miss Westland, and was master of her capital, and was resting in her arms. 'Oh,' she muttered, 'how he has walked over me, that man! For the sake of two or three thousand pounds, just for the sake of her money!' She sought weakly for the company-advertisement referred to, but the paragraphs swam together, and it was several minutes before she could discover it. Yes, here it was: '"The Foibles of Fashion" and repertoire, opening August 4th. "Camille," eh?' She laughed bitterly. 'He was going to play Armand; it had always been his wish to play Armand: now he could do it! "Under the

direction of Mr. Seaton Carew. Artists respectfully informed the company is complete. All communications to be addressed: Mr. Seaton Carew, Bath Hotel, Bournemouth." Oh, my God!'

To think that while she had been starving in that attic he had been calmly conducting his courtship, to reflect that in one of those terrible hours she had passed through he must have been dressing himself for his wedding, punctured her heart. And now, while she leant on the gate, wrung with the knowledge, he was whispering in the other woman's ear, calling her 'Olive,' and kissing her. She gripped the bar with both hands, her breast heaved tumultuously; it seemed to her her punishment was more than she had power to bear. Was not his sin viler than her own? she questioned; yet what price would he ever be called upon to pay for it? At most, perhaps, occasional discontent! The world would blame him not a whit; his offence was condoned already by a decent woman's hand. In the wife's eyes she, Mary, was of course an adventuress who had turned his

weakness to account until the heroine appeared on the scene to reclaim him. How easy it was to be the heroine when one had a few thousand pounds to bid for a wedding-ring! How easy to be termed 'adventuress' when men set so high a value on their names, and squandered their honour with such lavishness!

She let the paper lie where it had fallen, and bent her way to the library with lagging steps. In leaving it she encountered Dr. Kincaid on his road to the Lodge. He was rather glad of the meeting, the man to whom women had been only patients, but who of late had felt vaguely once or twice that it was agreeable to address some commonplace to Miss Brettan, and pleasant to hear her when she replied.

'Hallo,' he said, in that voice of his which had so little inflection in it; 'what have you been doing? Going home?'

'I've been to get a book for Mrs. Kincaid,' she answered; 'she was hoping you'd come round to-day.'

'I meant to have come yesterday. Well, how are

you getting on? still satisfied with Westport? Not beginning to tire of it yet?'

'Indeed no,' she said; 'I like it very much, naturally. It's a great change from the life I had three months ago; I shouldn't be very grateful if I weren't satisfied.'

'That's all right. Your coming was a good thing; my mother was saying the other evening it was a slice of luck.'

'Oh, I am so glad!' she returned; 'I have wanted to know whether I—did!'

'You "do" uncommonly; I haven't seen her so content for a long while. You don't look very bright; d'ye feel well?'

'It's the heat,' she averred; 'yes, I am quite well, thank you; I have a slight headache this afternoon, nothing more.'

She was wondering if Carew would ever cross her path again. How horrible it would be if chance brought him to play in the town, and she came face to face with him in the High Street, and betrayed what the meeting cost her!

'Hasn't my mother been out to-day herself? She ought to take advantage of the fine weather.'

'I left her in the garden; I think she enjoys that better than taking walks.'

And it might happen so easily, she reflected; why not that company among the two score companies and upward which in the course of every year stayed a week or a fortnight each in Westport! She would be frightened to leave the house.

'The garden, eh? I suppose when you first heard there was a garden you expected to see apple-trees and strawberry-beds, didn't you—coming to the country—instead of a scrap of ground like that? I always say, when we want to fancy ourselves in London, all we need do is to go out there. There's a true Bloomsbury luxuriance about those plants.'

'Oh, I don't think it's so bad; I think it's rather pretty, what there is of it. We had tea out there last night.'

She might be walking with Mrs. Kincaid, and Tony and his wife suddenly confront her as they

came round a corner. And 'Miss Westland' would draw aside in contempt, of course, and Tony would droop his eyes, and—and if she turned white, and he detected her agitation, she should loathe herself! He would look at her, she might be sure; he would look at her before his eyes fell, never a doubt of it. Her womanhood was sensible of a certain tremulous elation to think there was no doubt of it—to think that, though they were less than nothing to each other now, they had once been too much for the man ever to contemplate her without her stirring some emotion in him.

'Then I missed an *al-fresco* repast? You must enliven the old lady a good deal if she goes in for that sort of thing; did you suggest it?'

'I don't know,' she said; 'we found ourselves agreeing it was stuffy indoors, and that tea outside would be pleasanter. I don't think I am a particularly enlivening person, but I'm better than no one, I dare say. It must have been rather dreary for her alone.'

'You praise yourself very highly! why aren't you a particularly enlivening person?'

'I mean I've no fund of animal spirits. Some women always have a laugh ready; and we seldom laugh; we chat in the quietest fashion. Our days pass much in the style in which you see us when you come round—an armchair each, and some needlework or a novel. Mrs. Kincaid talks about you, and——'

'And you're secretly rather bored? That's a mother's privilege, you know, to weary everybody about her son; you mustn't be hard on her.'

'I am interested, on the contrary; I think it's always interesting to hear of a man's work in a profession. By rights, of course, business-men ought to interest one just as much—nobody can do anything higher than his best, and to strive loyally in any pursuit is noble—but somehow the details of a profession rouse my sympathy more. And, then, Medicine was my father's.'

'Were you the only child?'

'Yes. I wasn't much of a child, though; my mother died when I was quite young, and I was taught a lot through that. The practice wasn't very good—very remunerative, that is to say—and

if a girl's father isn't well off she becomes a woman early. If I had had a brother now——'

'If you had had a brother—what?'

'I was thinking it might have made a good deal of difference in one way and another. Nothing in especial! I don't suppose he would have been of any pecuniary assistance; there would not have been anything to give him a start with. But I should have liked a brother — one older than I am.'

'You would have made a very earnest man of him, I believe.'

'Oh, my thoughts were rather of what he would have made of me. A brother must be such a counsellor to one: he goes into the world and learns; a girl can only stop at home and conjecture. Her actions are based on instinct; he has knowledge to guide him.'

'Yet a woman's instinct generally keeps her the safer of the pair.'

'It needs the education of life, doctor, surely?'

'No, I fancy not; just the alphabet at home. We medical men see misfortune in many shapes.

and nine-tenths of the miserable women we encounter are not the ones who have been bred in ignorance of the world, but those who have had it for their only school. In my opinion the best tuition one woman can have is another good woman's.'

'A mother's?'

'I think so. Half the women who marry are no more fitted to be mothers than the majority of men are to train sons. Many of the women who never marry were born to be mothers, and nobody woos them, or their wooers inspire no tenderness, and fine material is allowed to waste.'

The entrance to a cottage they were passing stood open, and she could see into the parlour. There were teacups on the table, and a mug of wild flowers. On a garden-gate a child with a pink pinafore was slowly swinging. The brilliance of the day had subsided, and the town lay soft and yellow in the restfulness of sunset. A certain liquidity was assumed by the rugged street in the haze that hung over it; a touch of transparence gilded its flights of steps, the tiles of the house-

tops, and the homely faces of the fisher-folk where they loitered before their doors. There a girl sat netting among the hollyhocks, withholding confession from the youth who lounged beside her, yet lifting at times a smile to him which had not been wakened by the net. The melody of the hour intensified the burning in the woman's soul.

'Don't you consider——' said Kincaid.

He turned to her, strolling along with his hands behind him. He talked to her, and she answered him, until they reached the house.

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